MISER'S MONEY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

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Miser's Money

By

Eden Phillpotts

AUTHOR OF "STORM IN A TEACUP," ETC.

London : William Heinemann

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5177
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MISER'S MONEY

CHAPTER I

THE RACE OF MORTIMER

In mid moor there is a great plain ringed round about with hills. One hog-backed ridge blocks the southern horizon and the majestic outlines of Cater's Beam, unfretted by tor or forest, describe a gentle arc upon the sky; while northerly the land climbs again, and beneath it subtend the grazing grounds, peat cuttings and water-logged flats of Fox Tor Mire. The region glitters with little tributaries that flow to Dart, for Swincombe River, Nun's Cross Brook, the Strane and Fox Tor Gulf Stream all run through the Mire.

This huge cup of jade exhibits scooped sides fretted with granite. Herein can a whole thunderstorm expend itself, or both foundations of a rainbow foot. Mists wander over its streamlets and break in waves of colourless light upon its sides; the Mire will often disappear under the grey sheets of a Dartmoor downpour; and in hard winters it lies beneath a pelt of snow, that reduces its immensity, dwarfs its details and makes Cater's Beam look like a mighty polar bear. There is little high colour at any time. Sobriety characterises its tones, as restraint marks its contours. Even in August, when the lesser furzes glow and ling washes the waste with delicate rose and pearl, the dim green and grey persist among the far flung, gloomy passages of black and broken earth. Only at clear dawns and sunsets will Fox Tor Mire sound its highest colour song, brim with delicate and transient brightness, shine through all its granite reeves and clitters, and blush over its moss bogs, where the sphagna glow ivory white, emerald green and wine purple.

Upon either brink of this great basin and separated by the miles of it flung between, there stand human dwellings.

To the south-east, under Ter Hill, fragments of a house still rise ; while at the other point of the bow, where the hill descends from Nun's Cross to the south-west, habitations cluster together at the hamlet of White Works and stare out across the Mire upon the ruin over against them.

A group of fallen walls and perished outbuildings, of which no more than the foundations remain, mark the grey spot in its desert of green where once stood Fox Tor Farm. Respectable apparent age distinguishes these fragments and the weathered and shattered entrances, the empty joist-holes and fretted casements suggest antiquity. Yet one hundred years ago this place had but newly sprung into existence. Its entire life, its erection and desertion, its prosperity and downfall, were crowded within the duration of little more than half a century. Long years ago its brief days were numbered and for six decades it had already written hope, enterprise and failure upon the wilderness.

The ruin was still linked to living persons, however, and from White Works and Nun's Cross Farm, on the hill above it, four human beings could regard the tumbled masses of stone across the valley as the birthplace of their mother.

In 1820, Mary Jane Worth first saw the light at Fox Tor Farm. She was the daughter of the headman and his wife, the dairymaid. In 1850, by which time her birthplace stood already deserted, Mary Jane had wed with one John Mortimer. John's father it was who created the first "newtake" croft at Nun's Cross and built of earth and stone a dwelling beside that ancient memorial. His son succeeded him, improved upon the original hovel, extended the cultivated clearings by many acres, and presently brought his bride to dwell at Nun's Cross Farm. Four children were issue of the marriage and Mary Jane bore two girls and two boys.

At the passing of John Mortimer, his eldest son, David, continued to dwell at Nun's Cross. He lifted the place to still higher prosperity, by breeding of cattle, rather than cultivation of land ; erected a stout, stone house and used his first home and birthplace for a cattle byre.

David was now sixty-five and his brother and two

sisters all lived at White Works. Sarah Mortimer, a spinster, of two and sixty, resided alone ; Nathan Mortimer dwelt with his wife and daughter close by, at a farm of twenty-five acres, spread upon the scene of a vanished tin mine ; while Mary Worth, the youngest of the family, now a widow, shared the same block of old cottages inhabited by her sister, Sarah. They were commodious dwellings, known as the Black Houses, three in number, wherein miners had lived aforetime ; but the descendants of Mary Jane and John Mortimer now occupied two, while the third was empty.

Mary Worth had three children, James, Barry and Damaris. James, aged thirty, worked in a large shop at Princetown, three miles away ; Barry, five years younger, was a farm labourer, and Damaris, a girl of two and twenty, helped her mother. All lived at home.

These people constituted the community of White Works, save for one other family. A ruined cottage or two still encumbered the hamlet and stumps of vanished dwellings indicated a more populous past. For here, as its name implied, was once a centre of tin mining, but with the failure of the adventure, the spot had sunk into obscurity and now remained remote and well nigh forgotten —a picturesque, time-foundered survival of its ancient self.

Sanguine souls still doubted not the industry would be revived, and Nathan Mortimer was one of these. At present fifty years separated White Works from its past activities. One grass grown track meandered among its houses and ruins ; rings of weathered stones surrounded its mine adits, to keep the cattle from falling into them ; but far away, behind the southern hills, a prosperous tin mine picked up the lodes of subterranean ore, and many believed that White Works might presently resume its suspended labours.

"Given a new generation who forget the failure," said Nathan Mortimer, "and you'll find a new mine floated with all the new wisdom of these times. Then we shall rise again."

He was a man of some sentiment. When died his father, John Mortimer, his mother had come to dwell with Sarah, her unmarried daughter, at White Works ;

and upon her eightieth birthday, in the year 1900, Nathan, with his two sisters and old Mary Jane's grandchildren, made holiday, mounted the dame upon a moth-eaten pillion, reminiscent of her youth, and took her to the ruins of her birthplace, at Fox Tor Farm on the other side of the Mire.

Little more now remained of it than walls high enough to shelter cattle from the sun and wind. Nettles alone throve in the foundations of the vanished chambers; yet Mary Jane remembered the old plan and could point to the hall and the house-place, the dairy, and the litter of stones, once a stable, where great pack-horses were stalled. But the upper chamber, wherein she first saw the light, had long since vanished away.

The holiday party ate their meat and made a fire, that the grandam might drink a dish of tea in her ancient home; and Nathan and Sarah and Mary remembered the incident with satisfaction, for their mother had been cheerful and well pleased. No sad memory clouded the occasion and the old woman rejoiced in her little hour of importance.

Now she lay beside John Mortimer and his parents and her own, in Princetown churchyard; but her race persisted;

CHAPTER II

THE BETROTHED

One afternoon an old man tramped over the sedge and heath from Nun's Cross Farm to White Works in the vale beneath. July sunshine burned upon him and he had placed a piece of fern over his time-worn hat to protect the nape of his neck from the heat. He wore ragged, much-mended garments and held a long stick in his right hand, to steady his feet and support him. He was red as a radish, with skin much wrinkled about the brow and chops. A thick bush of white hair surrounded his jowl and his muzzle glittered with the sprouting hair which he only shaved off once a week. His face showed character, for the upper lip was long and the mouth, though cast by accident into a steadfast grin—a sort of archaic smile that never left it—was very hard and immobile. It spread between his heavy chin and blunt, solid nose, in a gash without any curve of yielding or contour of lip. His eyes were grey and set near together, while the brow above them receded sharply and its rufous wrinkles were lost on a squat skull—where a little white hair still struggled.

David Mortimer was older than his years and experienced indescribable irritation on the days when certain physical symptoms warned him that he must absent himself from the toil he loved.

By the leat he now tramped for half a mile, then reached the road to White Works which crossed the water at a bridge. He sat here for a few moments and seeing the worn fragment of a broken horseshoe lying silver-bright in the road, picked it up, dusted it and put it in his pocket.

Presently he descended to the homes of his family, passed before the tarred, sulky fronts of the Black Houses and entered the door of the third, where dwelt his sister, Sarah. A girl was on her knees in the kitchen scrubbing the floor, but she lept up at the sound of Mr. Mortimer's

voice—a thin, resonant note, high-pitched and vibrating.

"Where's she to?"

"Miss Mortimer have just gone to the spring for some sweet water, please, sir."

"Have she? And you'll be Jane Bond, I suppose?"

"Yes, please, sir."

David regarded the slim, half-grown maiden who now stood before him.

"I've heard some tom-fool talk that my man, Little Jack, is running after you. You'll ruin him if you let it go on. You'll ruin somebody sooner or later no doubt. But leave him alone, or he'll be turned away from Nun's Cross."

Jane Bond did not answer. Her brown eyes roamed over the old man's leathern leggings. Then she lifted them to his face full of wonder, but not fear. David's sister returned and Jane picked up her bucket and disappeared.

Sarah Mortimer carried a red, cloam jug which she had filled at a spring in the coomb beside her house. The water broke out there from beneath a great granite boulder, where grew foxgloves and ferns. It bubbled ice-cold from the depths, then flashed away to join a larger stream in the Mire beneath.

Miss Mortimer resembled her brother; but her expression was different. No smile habitually sat on her face, yet a smile would leap quickly to her placid countenance upon occasion and she looked at life from the standpoint of her two and sixty spinster years. She had been a pretty woman, with the fresh Mortimer complexion, bright brown hair, fine grey-blue eyes and a full figure. But now her hair was grey, her back a little bent, her body grown thin. She smiled and shook hands with her brother. Her voice was musical.

"Mornin' David. Haven't seen 'e this longful time. Pretty middling by the look of it?"

"I'm all right."

She knew that he wanted something, for Mr. Mortimer never visited his relations unless that was the case. But she left it to him to speak and offered him a glass of cider.

"No," he said. "I'll drink a drop of your spring water. I ain't one for cider."

He sat down and wiped his brow with his sleeve.

"Never see the cotton grass in such amazing plenty," he said. "It means a hot summer—not too hot I hope. I hate to see the cattle strolls go brown, like they did last year, and rob the things of their lawful food."

"Nature don't think of our beasts in particular."

"No, you can't rely upon her—gives with one hand and takes away with t'other. Promises a harvest beyond common; then sends the blasted rains, so as we can't save, and gives half what was ours by right to the mice and birds. Nature's a female in fact."

"We'm no more than the mice and birds to her I reckon."

He sipped the water. It was so cold that it had created a dewy mist on the glass.

"Have you heard the great news about James and Anstice?" she asked him.

"Great news about them two fools?"

"Tokened at last. Of course we all knew it was coming. But James is so timid—even of his cousin, once he was in love with her. They ought to suit each other, because they are both so gentle. Too self-conscious to be happy I reckon. But perhaps they'll back each other up against the world. They're both so good as gold."

"Fegs! Don't you talk of gold like that," he said; "there's nought human that's so good as gold in my experience, and nought human you can trust like gold. Gold's straight—gold don't play you no tricks. I'm sick to death of all this twaddle about marrying. What does the man want to put a rope round his neck for? I always felt James was three parts a fool. But it won't happen. He won't be allowed to have her. Nathan's wife will see to that."

Sarah sighed.

"It ain't going to be stopped I hope," she said.

"Give me a piece of sealing-wax."

She rose and rummaged in a box upon the alcove of the window ledge. It shared the ledge with a dusty geranium or two.

"Women, women! the root and branch of all trouble, and the flower and fruit of the same," he said.

She found what he needed and he took it without thanks. Then he rose to go and Sarah went a few yards with him. He stopped and regarded the empty cottage which separated the homes of his sisters. The door was locked and the windows nailed up. A chimney pot had fallen into the garden, where ran a riot of weeds and a few, languishing, perennial flowers that perished slowly amid the stouter natives. Here was a jungle of tansy and wormwood, clover and dock.

"What emptied that house and sent Matthew Easterbrook down the hill? A woman."

"Not altogether. He was a meek sort of a man and forgave her when she came back to him. They'd have been happy again, more or less, if she hadn't died. Then he was bound to go; and when he seed the wormwood creep in the garden, he went. A sort of foolish fancy he'd got against the herb. I never knew any other man read ill into it. His wife planted that garden thing with leaves like cotton-wool you see there, and Matthew put a bit on her grave because she liked it."

"To take her back! It makes you feel shame for being a man."

"And no doubt you'd have us all ashamed for being women."

"Fegs! You ought to be. A woman's the world, the flesh and the devil rolled in one. The ingredients is mixed different in different females; but that's all there is to any of you under your skins."

Sarah laughed.

"What about the women that are angels then? You hear tell of that sort too."

"Yes; you hear tell of 'em—same as you hear tell of the precious stone in a toad's head. But you never see 'em. When I was a green boy I killed scores and scores of toads for that precious stone. But I never found it. And there's another pair after love-making seemingly. I hear a murmur that my man, Jack Bascombe's boy, is after your Jane. I won't have that."

Sarah made no reply to this threatened peril, but returned to her niece.

"Anstice is so good a little maid as need be—a truth-lover and great sympathy for us older women."

"Too young to judge you yet. She's got a sly mother and she'll be sly herself presently."

"Are you going to see Mary?" asked his sister, for now they stood opposite the house of Mrs. Worth.

"No. Must get home-along. My *sparkey cow's took bad and I ban't sure what's amiss with her."

"Oh dear, not the beautiful creature Mrs. Bascombe calls 'Ladybird'?"

"The same. I'm fearing I may have to get the vet. to her. Not that he knows any more about 'em than I do."

"I hope she'll recover, David, I'm sure."

"I hope so. In these hard times we don't want to lose valuable creatures. 'Tis some poison she've picked up on the Moor I reckon."

He went off without further speech and Sarah watched him trudge away till he sank to a grey spot on the heath. Then she entered her sister's home.

David meantime fell in with those concerning whom he had just heard. A young man and woman, descending the cart track from Princetown, saw their uncle proceeding by the leat path, recognised him and, leaving the road, hastened after him.

The pair held each other's hands and ran over the rough ground like children.

James Worth was thirty years old, but looked not more than five and twenty. His boyish face was flushed and excited. He was slight built, of medium height and very fair. His features were small, his eyes large and pale blue. He wore a sand-coloured moustache, which did not hide his mouth. There was something girlish about him, accentuated for the moment by his emotions. His cousin might have been his sister. She was slim with small hands and feet, and a gentle, beautiful little face, pure, lustrous and appealing. Her hair was darker than her lover's and abundant. Her eyes were very large and a pale, golden brown. She looked delicate under the heightened colour of her happiness. She had lost a front tooth by accident and the fact lent character to her small mouth. She seemed a maiden almost too frail and dainty for her rough dwelling-place and the life of the uplands.

* *Sparkey* = Piebald.

"Uncle David!" shouted James, as they reached the old man. "Here we are; stay a minute and hear the news."

"We're tokened, Uncle! We've loved each other ever so long, and such a pair of zanies we were, we only found it out yesterday," added David's niece.

He stopped, sniffed and looked at them in their joy. A moment's thought on their part had probably not taken them across the heather to him, for they knew very well his opinions and, had they acted less on impulse, might have let him alone.

"Zanies for sure," he said. "You're right there. And what should a pair like you do to mate? A rush and reed you be."

He grinned while he stabbed.

"Not us," answered the man. "A very steadfast couple I can tell you, Uncle. I'm to get five shillings a week more at Edward's stores and we're going to live in one of the new houses at Princetown, that Mr. Masters is putting up."

"Wish us luck, Uncle David," urged the girl. "Won't hurt you to hope for us anyway."

"There's no luck in that man's quarter for you, and I tell you so. He's the sort that's better single. So's every man for that matter; but James ban't cut out to rule, and the only fashion of man that can keep his self-respect hitched to a female is the ruling sort."

"Who wants to rule, Uncle? Marriage is give and take, and if there's such love as we've got for each other——"

But David interrupted.

"Marriage is give and take, as you say, and all women are spiders' wives and all married men are spiders' husbands, though they think they ain't going to be. Haven't I seen it? Don't I know? What does the female spider do? Eat her mate. And that's what the female human does, and the men,—poor, blind gawks—don't know what's happening to 'em and think all's going on well while she's crunching off limb after limb! Married men are being ate alive all the time—sucked dry, gnawed to the bone, robbed, emptied, ruined. Their brains are sapped, their intellects drawn down to woman's level, their hope

marred, their souls damned. And they strut about—the shadows of their bachelor selves, and the scorn of them that be free. And you—you're a shadow now, and God knows what a ghost of a man you'll be if you wed and have a hand in raising up more shadows like yourself."

James faded somewhat under this contempt and Anstice flushed.

"We might have known what you'd think, Uncle," she said.

"I don't change. And as for you, you'll hear what you've got to hear from your own mother. May Mortimer won't have any truck with this and you know it, Anstice."

"Father's well pleased," she said; but there was a shadow of fear in her eyes.

"Your father makes good what I tell you. He was a man I respected when he was single; but not now. He's a spider's husband. Your mother knows where you're going to marry; and so do you, for all this play-acting along with James."

"You're against us, Uncle David, and I'm sorry to God we stopped you!" cried the young man petulantly.

"Not against you and not for you. And no matter if I was. The only thing a man has to reckon with in this world is his own character, and the build of brains in his head-piece. 'Tis them that be against us, or for us. What will happen will happen."

"If we're not strong enough to work our own salvation, it's a pity," retorted James.

"It may be, James. It may be a pity, or it may be a blessing in disguise; but that's just what you ain't. You're not strong enough to work your own salvation."

"True love never runs smooth," said Anstice; "but you'll live to know you're wrong, Uncle David. You'll be asked to our wedding yet."

"Think better of it and bend to the blast that's coming," he continued. Then he went forward and left them standing together. Their fires had died a little and James glowered after the retreating figure.

"Old devil!" he said, when David was out of ear-shot.

"We might have known. We didn't want his warning, I'm sure."

"Are grown-up people going to be defied?" he asked. "Good Lord! You'd think we were a brace of silly children, 'Play-acting'—that was his word. What we feel and what we are—'play-acting'!"

"He's thinking of Mr. Pascoe."

"And what is he to us?"

"It's what he is to my mother."

"You're not afraid of your mother, however?"

"Not with you beside me, James."

"He's little better than a carrion bird—Uncle David. His money's his carrion. He ought to be a miserable creature when he thinks of all he's lost and what he's got to show for his life. But he's not miserable. He's happy in a horrible sort of way. It's contrary to Nature, Anstice, that he should be happy."

"To know what you want, and get it, is to be happy no doubt."

"Then we are. And will be, despite fifty such grizzling old hunks as he is. Dash the man—he always looks oil and talks vinegar. His grin is the beastliest thing about him, for it promises kindness and is a lie all the time."

"Never mind him. Talk about ourselves. There's an hour yet before tea," she answered.

They sat down presently overlooking the hamlet that was their home, and built castles in the air. Their hopes were artless and ingenuous. They embraced no great ambitions, but proceeded by the conventional path. Simplicity marked their sentiments and a lack of synthesis their trend of mind. They were concerned more with the things they wanted than the means to reach them. But the future looked fair beyond present cloud shadows.

"It'll be all right—if only other people will let us alone," said Anstice with his arm round her.

He dimly perceived the absurdity of such a suggestion.

"It's natural for you to say so, because we're the easy sort and always give in," he answered. "But it's nonsense even to suggest interference. Who's got a right to interfere? You know your own mind and why shouldn't you marry me? I'm a capable man and Edwards can trust me with his whole shop if need be. Granted your mother would like to see you take 'Gentleman' Pascoe. Well, it can't happen for very good reasons. You don't

want to marry him and you do want to marry me, so enough said."

"Mother's got an awful way of bringing things round to her liking, all the same," declared the girl. Then they abandoned the uneasy present for the hopeful future.

"What I love to think of is the restfulness with you, Jimmy. I don't so much hanker for nice things, or even pretty things, but the great gift of time. It seems to me a girl never gets any time to herself, like what men do. Men take care to have a bit of the twenty-four hours to themselves and think of something better than work; but come a girl grows up, she never gets any time at all. And before they grow up for that matter. The boys go out to play and the girls be quite as playful as the boys by nature, but they've got to help their mothers and do chores and look after the little ones."

"You'll have all the time you want when we're married," he said. "You shall have lots of time for your own rest and pleasure—and I'll share it."

"The time you share will be the best of all," promised she.

Then they went their way and presently entered the home of James Worth.

CHAPTER III

THE HOME OF JAMES

The distinctive feature of Mrs. Mary Worth's parlour was a clock upon the mantelshelf. It had been presented to her late husband as a mark of respect and regard, when he retired from a subordinate position in the employ of the Duchy. For Duchy was the overlord of Princetown and the Forest of Dartmoor, and it employed many men in various capacities. This piece of ornate gilt kept good time and chimed loudly, so that Mary said she was reminded of her husband every half hour.

The little parlour was furnished with six chairs, two armchairs and a sofa upholstered in red. Upon the walls hung photographs of the family and an engraving of his late Majesty, King Edward VII., when Prince of Wales. Now a party of men and women filled the room and took tea together.

Mary Worth preserved the general characteristics of the Mortimers; she had been a personable woman and was attractive still. Her younger son, Barry, was handsome, with dark complexion, crisp, curly hair and clean cut features. His expression was intelligent and not without humour, and his eyes were dark grey, bright and rather sly. He shaved clean and exhibited a virile, masculine personality—an abrupt contrast to the gentler and rather washed-out vision of his elder brother. Some years separated them; but Barry had far quicker wits and more fighting power. He felt implicit contempt for James, yet loved him and was well pleased at his present good fortune. The younger brother preserved a cheerful, apprehensive and receptive attitude to life. He had not yet found himself, but was experimenting. Everything interested him. He kept his own council and had secrets. They were harmless, but he liked to have them. He was not as yet industrious, and the fact appeared in certain news he presently broke to his family.

But for to-day the betrothed pair enjoyed the attention of their circle. Damaris Worth resembled her mother and was a Mortimer; indeed only James revealed nothing of maternal prepotency in mind or body. His sister was a practical, sensible girl, now also upon the fringe of romance, for she was walking out with Benjamin Halfyard, the shoesmith; and this young man completed the company.

Only that morning had James imparted his news, then twelve hours old, and now his mother met Anstice for the first time since she knew it. The engagement came as no great surprise for any of them, since the ingenuous James had not concealed his affection; but the attachment had drifted on through some years, and so slightly was the resolution of the young man and woman esteemed that those concerned suspected nothing might really come of it. And that the more certainly, because the mother of Anstice was known to have plans for her child in a direction quite different from James.

Now, however, with a sudden addition to his wages, the lover had spoken, and his cousin, fond enough of him and thankful to be free of a growing embarrassment, had accepted him with delight. The long, desultory courting was ended in a triumphant betrothal and the simple pair declared their amazement to think that they could thus have remained apart while their hearts were seeking all the while to be united.

Mary kissed Anstice and Damaris also kissed her. In their minds was uneasiness; but they hid it before the delight of the lovers, and declared their enthusiasm ere they talked about the engagement from the standpoint of family.

"You sly things!" said Damaris, "and to keep it all so hid."

"God's my judge we didn't know it ourselves till yesterday," declared James with pride. "We unfolded our feelings all of a sudden—didn't we, Anstice? and then found to our great joy that we'd only been waiting for the words to spring to my lips."

"How did you ask her, old man?" enquired Barry. "We bachelors can get a tip from you dashing fellows who have taken the plunge—eh, Ben?"

But Mr. Halfyard lacked both imagination and humour.

"Oh, no," he answered. "Every chap must do that job according as the spirit moves him at the accepted time. 'Twouldn't help another man to know how James done it."

"And nobody will know better than you how to do it, when the day comes, Barry," declared Damaris. "For that matter I daresay you've had lots of practice a'ready —so fond of the girls as you be."

"Not him," declared the mother of Barry. "He knows he won't have to ax twice—vain creature!"

"I don't know nothing about the girls," vowed her younger son. "'Tis James as be learned in them. And now he'll be married and leave us all."

"We're going to dwell in one of the new cottages that Alfred Masters is building at Princetown. We shan't be far off and I shall be near my work, so it's quite fitting. But don't you think you won't see me every week, mother, for sometimes I shall come to White Works Sundays, and sometimes you'll come and have your dinner along with us in our house after morning church."

"D'you like the thought of a house of your own, Anstice?" asked Damaris.

"Yes, I do then—love it."

"And a rare good cook, for I've heard your mother say so."

"I'm fond of cooking, Aunt Mary."

"That's to the good then, because I warn you, Jimmy's got rather a fansical appetite."

"I haven't, mother!"

"Yes, you have, James. I'm not saying it's a fault against you. You're a delicate build of man and your inside's got to be thought on. We can't all be cart horses, though we most are."

"I'll lay he'll like what Anstice cooks for him," said Damaris, with a glance at Mr. Halfyard. "Now I don't know nothing about cooking at all, do I, mother?"

"Oh, yes you do, and you only say you don't for compliments," declared James, moved for Mr. Halfyard, who had raised his eyebrows and rounded his eyes slightly. "She's a nailer, Ben, and if you ever taste one of her rabbit pies cold, you'll kno whether she can cook."

"She's her own worst enemy in my experience,"

answered the blacksmith. "She gives herself a bad character, but whether it's modesty or mischief, who shall say?"

"You find out, Ben: it isn't for us to tell you," answered Barry.

They ate and drank and plied James and Anstiee with many questions. The lovers chatted to them like children, and James enjoyed the unusual experience of being the central figure in his home; for Barry, who by force of character occupied that situation as a rule, effaced himself on this occasion.

It was a question from him, however, that cast the lovers into a serious mood.

"Have you been to see Uncle Nathan yet?" he inquired of his brother.

"No; I go to-morrow afternoon."

"Mother asked me to ask James to come in to Sunday dinner," said Anstiee, "and afterwards father will have a talk about it."

"Your mother said nought?"

"No, Aunt Mary."

"I'm afraid she's not going to be too pleased, my dear. You must face that."

"So long as father——" began Anstiee; but Mrs. Worth shook her head.

"Not a breath against your father, of course; not a breath against your mother neither; but—you know, Anstiee."

"Aunt May's got the whip hand of Uncle Nathan all the time and every time, Anstice, and it's no good pretending different," declared Barry.

"I don't like this talk, and you oughtn't to say such things," struck in James. "It's for me and Anstice to settle this affair; and we have settled it, haven't we? The deed's done."

"To talk bold ain't the same thing as to act bold," answered Barry. "But I'm glad you feel like that, because words won't answer with Aunt May. You've got all of us on your side anyway—and Uncle Nathan, too, I should think—so there's only Aunt May and 'Gentleman' Pascoe up against you."

James flushed.

"This is very inconvenient sort of talk—before Anstice, too," he said.

"Better to know where you are before you start. Anstice and you have got to show what you're good for," answered Damaris. And then her cousin spoke.

"I'm very sorry there should be anybody who couldn't see that James and I are made for each other," said the girl. "But there's a few won't, and we must try to convince them, mustn't we, James?"

"It's a matter of justice," replied Barry. "I'm always up for justice before anything; and there'd be no justice in keeping you apart; and if I can help, I will."

"We shan't want help, Barry. Hang it all, we might be a pair of know-nought children! This has happened and it must go through in a proper, dignified way at our appointed time. Our time, mind you. I can't think so badly of Aunt May as to fear she'd say a word against it. And if Charles Pascoe wanted Anstice, as it's allowed he was beginning to do—then he's too late and must seek somewhere else. Better men than him have been crossed in love."

James had grown hot and vexed.

"Leave it at that, then, and see your uncle and aunt to-morrow, and talk to them like the man you are," advised his mother with soothing voice.

"There's Uncle David against us, too," murmured Anstice. "We met him and told him the news, and he dressed us down as if we were a boy and girl minching from school."

Damaris laughed.

"He'll cut you out of his will, James! He hates to hear anybody's going to be married."

This statement touched the guest.

"What's the sense of that?" asked Mr. Halfyard, suddenly. "You can't condemn everybody to be single just because you don't like the women yourself. I suppose some female turned Mr. Mortimer down in his youth and he can't forget, or forgive."

"Nobody ever got the chance to turn him down," answered Mrs. Worth. "My brother was always the same. As a young man he never could abide women."

"Three things he hates far worse then he hates hell,"

said Barry, "and they are women and lawyers and Duchy. Nothing's too bad for any of them. Yet we've never heard that any of them did him a bad turn in particular."

"He hates Duchy because it's a stern landlord and grudging and jealous of the tenants, and because it's gone back on the old Venville laws and don't let us have what we used to have; and he hates lawyers because, lawyer-like, they're always on the side of the strong against the weak, and still look to it there's one law for the rich and another for the poor," explained Mrs. Worth.

"But he is rich himself," said Damaris. "He's supposed to have tons and tons of money. He wouldn't be called Miser Mortimer if men didn't know he was snug."

"It's all hidden," answered her mother, "and though an interesting subject, a fruitless one for us, because we know nothing whatever of what he's got, or what he'll do with it. He lives harder than any man I ever knew, and he makes the Moor serve his turn as no man ever did before. But that's his delight; and saving was always his pleasure from the time he was a little boy."

"'Tis well known we can't take more out of the world than we brought in, however," argued Benjamin Halfyard. "No doubt it would be a matter of great interest to you people to have a sight of his will."

"And to more than us—eh, Ben?" chaffed Barry.

"One thing you may reckon as pretty certain, I believe: he won't leave any money to his sisters, or nieces, or any womankind," prophesied Mary Worth; "so Damaris needn't hope for it, nor yet Anstice."

"Surely he'll remember you and Aunt Sarah, mother?"

"Very unlikely indeed, Damaris. He'll take from us, as he always has; but he'll give nought."

"He's not dead yet, however," said James. "We'll hope with years that he'll come to see money's a false fire and no better than mud, if you don't put it to use."

"He's torn in half," declared Barry; "for once he told me so. Something I said interested him, and he let me have a sight into his mind. He said 'twas a nice question for a moneyed man between interest on one side and the blasted taxes on the other. 'Blasted' was his word. If you put your money out to interest, then it can't be hid that you've

got it; but where money is dead safe, interest runs low, seemingly. On the other hand, if you hide your money, you lose interest, but escape the tax-gatherers. I believe he'd actually rather lose a bit for the pleasure of doing the State and get his money value that way."

"How can you live without the State behind you?" asked James.

"He could. He don't want no State. The State don't do much for Nun's Cross Farm anyway. Pretty near everything he needs, but the rags on his back and the boots on his feet, comes out of the Moor. That's why he's mad with Duchy for charging him for what his father and grandfather built up, and also for coming between him and the game and fish."

They discussed this subject for a while; then the talk returned to James and Anstice.

Presently the company separated. Damaris, who had cleared away and washed up, put on her hat and went out into the July twilight with Benjamin; while James and his sweetheart also disappeared.

Barry was left. He smoked and talked to his mother concerning the betrothed.

"Poor old Jimmy," he said. "I'm afraid it ain't going to be very smooth waters for him."

"No—the dear chap. I could much wish he wasn't going to be opposed, Barry, for he's not the sort to shine against opposition."

"Love hardens up a man, I should reckon. The softest creatures will fight for their females."

"We must encourage him all we can—and back him up."

Barry reflected.

"I know what advice I'd give," he said. "If you're not built by strength of character to have your own way face to face with men, you'll do wise to get your own way behind their backs. If you can't fight for justice, you can scheme for it, and craft often carries further than force."

"There's no craft in James, and God send there'll be no need for any such thing," answered his mother. "We must hope 'twill go well. And don't you hint at anything doubtful, or double, to James—he's got a great opinion of you, Barry, and if you was to advise anything underhand it might lessen it."

" It won't lessen his opinion of me if I help him to get Anstice. But you needn't fear. My own business takes me all my time. I've got to look out for a new job next month. I'm leaving Frog End."

This was news to his mother, but occasioned her no surprise.

" A rolling stone—never you forget that, Barry."

" A rolling stone don't gather much moss," he admitted, " but it picks up experience. I've learned all I can at Frog End, and when Bassett was sour I took it in good part. There's plenty of work about for the likes of me."

CHAPTER IV

REJECTED

James Worth slept ill, for he regarded his visit to the parents of Anstice with some anxiety. Sunday dawned in splendour, however, and, as the morning mists rose off the flats of Fox Tor Mire, so did the cares spun of night evaporate from the young man's mind on the return of day.

At one o'clock he descended to the valley, where stood the only new dwelling in White Works. It was a square house faced with stucco and crowned with blue slate—an unlovely erection that had taken the place of one more picturesque but less comfortable. This businesslike abode stood in a green croft over which geese grazed and cackled mildly together. Below, a grassy road wound into the little meadows and turf cuttings that comprised the farm. It was a Duchy property. Evidences of the vanished mines persisted here, and Nathan Mortimer had piled great, dry-built walls of granite round the old adits, where they opened upon his fields.

The farmer himself was standing in his Sunday black regarding a little meadow under hay. Thorn trees cast a patch of shade over one corner of the seeding grasses, and therein stood Nathan and smoked his pipe. He was a contemplative man by force of circumstances. Married to a different woman, he might have evolved a more assertive philosophy; but his wife possessed a stronger will than his own, and the circumstances had made Nathan meditative. He was not an unhappy man, nor would he have confessed himself as oppressed; but his natural instincts of self-expression were modified, so that he mused on the problems of existence rather than busied himself with any solution to them. His partner had her way in most things, and Nathan seldom admitted to himself, and never to another, that it was a bad way. He

only speculated as to the altered values of life and pleasant additions to his own personal sojourn in the flesh, had he enjoyed freedom.

He was a solid, rather under-sized man, with a full, brown beard and stout-built body. He moved slowly and thought slowly. Now in his dreamy fashion he lifted his eyes to the face of his nephew and regarded him.

"Good morning, Uncle Nat. What grand weather for the hay."

"Morning, James. You be come, I see. As to hay, I begin to cut to-morrow, and the machine got here yesterday and stands in the byre this moment. I was just regarding the hay, and I see there's more knapweed and hawkweed and fool's parsley got in this grass than I thought. But they all go in. And so you want to marry our Anstice, James?"

"With all my heart and soul I do! We've found out we're made for each other, Uncle Nat. I don't believe ever a man and woman were built to neighbour so close as us."

"It may be so. You are cut a good bit in the same pattern—too much so if anything. 'Tis better, for lasting success, if the man and woman bring different gifts to the wedding; because, James, if they both see life with the same eyes, they have but one outlook upon it and cannot correct each other's point of view. In fact, 'tis borne in upon me that both of you being of the gentle order of humans, it's a very doubtful thing if you'll help each other, rather than hinder each other."

"Be sure we'll help each other."

"You think so, and if love could do all, I should have very little fear about it; but there's a lot goes to success in life besides love, James. In a word, what is your opinion upon the idea that a weak woman ought to mate with a strong-willed man; and a man of easy-going spirit, such as you are, should take a woman of character?"

James knew well enough that this theory had not worked to perfection in his uncle's case, but could not, of course, advance the personal matter as an argument. He shrank by a native instinct from inflicting pain on any ear, and though he sometimes threatened, behind their backs, to give other people a little of his mind, such a

thing never happened when he stood before their faces. Sometimes he would report conversations as having happened between him and another, and he would put words into his own mouth and really believe he had spoken them; but those who listened, if they knew James, were not deceived; he could hardly address a child with hortatory or commanding speech.

"No doubt it often happens so," he answered his uncle. "The weak often turn to the strong, because their instinct tells them they'll want more strength than they can bring to the battle of life if they're to win it. But that don't touch Anstice and me. We're stronger than people think in our quiet way, though we don't make a bluster about it. We know our own minds, and that's a tower of strength to begin with; and we only ask to be let alone to work out our lives together. I can tell you all I'm going to do for her."

"Keep it for after dinner; and before we go in, I'd better warn you, James, that your aunt is not much inclined to this match. Indeed, quite the contrary."

"Why, Uncle Nathan?"

"I'll not take the reasons out of her mouth. But you know she has a mind above common quality and great reasoning powers. She's seldom mistaken. You must be fair to us, James. I say 'us,' you'll notice."

A voice was lifted from the house and Anstice called her father.

"Dinner's on the table!" she cried; then, as she caught sight of them, she approached. She was clad in a white blouse and a sea-green skirt; and James felt a great load roll on to his heart, for though she smiled at him, he perceived that she had been weeping. He took no notice, however, but bade her good morning and followed his uncle into the house. Other inauspicious signs awaited him; for his Aunt May had obviously been crying too. She was a pale woman, thin and taller than her husband. Her hair was straw colour and abundant, and her lashes were also light and her eyes brown and inscrutable. They looked dim, but in reality her sight was good. To see evidence of tears in this quarter astounded James. He had never known his Aunt May to weep, or heard of her doing so. But there could be no doubt. She actually

wiped her eyes with a white cotton handkerchief as she shook his hand.

The meal, begun under these depressing conditions, gave pleasure to nobody. It had been Mrs. Mortimer's purpose to create an atmosphere—an art at which she excelled—and by the time James was done with his dinner, he found himself nervous, vexed and puzzled. He had never known his aunt in this plaintive mood. Her way was different as a rule, and by sheer strength of will and fixity of determination things usually fell out as she desired and deemed most wise. But to-day she did not take this line, and so his preparations to override a negative were wasted. Anstice hardly opened her mouth and kept her beautiful eyes fixed on her mother. What she had heard since the day before, James could only guess.

Presently he and her parents left the kitchen, where dinner was taken. Then his aunt invited the suitor to the parlour and set him in an armchair. Nathan accompanied them. He threw open the window, for this room lacked air and smelt close. Then the elder man pulled a chair to the side of his wife and lit his pipe. May Mortimer brought a blue glass smelling bottle from her pocket—her support at all moments of stress.

"In a word, James, you want to marry Anstice; and it's a very great sorrow to your uncle and me that you do," she began, "For why, my dear? Because you can't."

"And why can't I, aunt?"

"For two very good reasons, and either would be more than enough, in the opinion of your uncle and me, without the other. In the first place we have different ideas for Anstice, because right well we know her character. You see, James, a girl like Anstice, so gentle as a lamb, wants a husband out of the common, hard and strong, a fighter in fact. And you, with all your virtues, and nobody knows them better'n us—you ain't the sort."

"We're not only thinking of the girl, you perceive, James," said Nathan; "we're thinking of your future too, aren't we, mother?"

"Certainly we are—quite as much for you as her. You're not the sort for her, and she's not the sort for you. You want a managing woman, same as Anstice wants a managing man."

"And the managing man being in sight, as you know, James, so well as we do—then it follows——" he broke off and looked at his wife.

"It follows, as your uncle says, that we feel quite sure of the future happiness of our daughter."

"And I'm sure we hope that the right one will come along for you, too," added Nathan.

James reflected a moment before replying. He felt wounded in a dozen places and, for the moment, the injury to his pride hurt most.

"Why do you think me a poor, weak gaby, not equal to keeping a wife?"

"We don't, James. Indeed we don't think that," answered his aunt. "You've got good parts and more brains than most young men; but you brainy fellows think such a lot and see all around things in such a way that it often hinders your power of action. I've often marked it. Your own Uncle Nathan's like that, and I say it to his face. A man whose intellects be for ever working often finds his brains stand between him and deeds. And that's where a wife comes in. I haven't got anything like the brain of your uncle; but the energy to do is in me, and what his wit contrives, my will carries out."

Mr. Mortimer had long learned to laugh unseen. His wife often amused him thus before other people, though never when alone in his company. Her fictions, adopted to suit the passing hour, generally tended in this direction and she so often declared herself the machinery that moved in response to her husband's controlling purpose, that some believed it. But not Nathan. Now, however, he concealed his entertainment from James, because he knew his wife's determination in the matter of the engagement, and believed, upon the whole, that she might be right.

"In this matter, James," he said, "be sure we don't speak off the book. You do want a quick, sharp, practical sort of woman; and love, though a good and precious thing in its way, don't alter character and make the timid brave, or the stupid clever. Not that Anstice is stupid—her mother's daughter couldn't be that; but she's got a character that will depend for its happiness on a stronger and harder nature in her life's partner. And she's lacking

in experience of much that a woman wants if she's going to marry. She's cat-handed, I assure you, James. She breaks cloam something startling, for her thought is never in her task. And——"

He stopped, for his eyes were on his wife, and he perceived by her frown that he was following a mistaken line.

"These are small things," she said, "and of no account. We are dealing with the vital objections that prevent this. I've told you what I think, and it isn't a difference that can be got round in my judgment."

"What you say is, after all, only a matter of opinion, Aunt May," began James. "I can't feel that your objections are vital really. They only mean your opinion of my character. And why shouldn't you be mistook? You don't know me or my character, if I may say so. I may not be a born fighter, or a man of a pushing nature, who wants to get up top and don't care what corns he treads upon as he climbs. I grant I'm not like that; but I've took care of myself since I grew up, and I'm quite capable of taking care of Anstice. For that matter, I wouldn't say you don't hold her too lightly also—speaking humbly, as becomes me. She's sweet and gentle and would rather win friends than make enemies, and always knows the soft answer to turn away wrath; but why not? We can't all be managers; and when you say I ought to marry a manager, you really show how little you understand me; for I hate that sort, and so does Anstice. She'd never be happy with—well, you know."

Mrs. Mortimer sighed and looked careworn and troubled. She fell back upon her salts and sniffed deeply. In reality she was more wearied than worried by this interview. The necessity for tact and patience was manifest, because her relations had to be considered as well as James himself; and where, under other conditions, she would have been content to express her will once for all, in this matter she felt the need to advance more gently and with consideration for the defeated hopes of her daughter and nephew. For this reason Mrs. Mortimer had wept a little when Anstice wept, and declared herself a sad woman to stand between her only child and her hope of happiness.

But the end was absolutely determined in her mind.

"I wish it was in my power to feel differently," she said. "If there's one thing I mourn, and your uncle mourns, it is to come between the younger generation and what it wants and longs for. In this case, however, we're powerless, my dear; and even if you could convince me about the question of character—and we'd be only too willing to feel convinced if it was possible—even if you could convince us there, which you can't, there's the question of facts left over. That's the second reason I mentioned. Character may be doubtful, though your Uncle Nathan reads character in a way very out of the common and given to few, and I've never known him wrong; but facts are stubborn things, and there's no doubt whatever about facts."

"If you mean Charles Pascoe——"

"I do not. Mr. Pascoe needn't come into it at all. In fact, we feel it will be better to let the matter be settled once for all among ourselves and leave you free and Anstice free. The fact I mean is that you are first cousins, and everybody well knows that first cousins didn't ought to marry at any time, because it's a danger to the race."

"There's two opinions about that."

"There is—a right and a wrong opinion, like there is about most other questions. And we are on the side of right, James."

"Look at my mother. She married her cousin, my father."

"She did, and thank God it worked well and your dear mother was a happy woman, and her children are as she would have wished them to be. But you can't fly in the face of Providence too often, James," declared Nathan, "and the very fact that you are the son of cousins, and came safely through that great ordeal, is another good reason why we shouldn't have no more inbreeding in the family—eh, mother?"

"You never said a truer word," she answered. "It's summed up in that, James. Not for no contrariness or unkindness do we speak, but quite the opposite. For love of our daughter, and for kindness and affection to you, we are going to take this line."

The baffled young man felt powerless. His nature had no response to make. For a moment anger waxed in him

but it died unseen. He told himself that here was the first great challenge to his manhood and his wits—the supreme moment of his life up to this hour of it. Now or never he must rise and gird up his loins and battle for everything that made that life worth living. Nothing else mattered but Anstice. Into his existence love, after long smouldering, had flamed and brought reality. There had wakened with it acuter self-consciousness and keener desire. The first he had scarcely realised, and the second, until now, he had never felt. Yet he was dumb. His ideas seethed, and he knew he could not utter them. He lacked logic or any power of argument. Had his uncle or aunt been bitter, scornful, impatient, words might have been stung from him; but they were both calm and regretful. It was not in his nature to return harshness for suavity. He felt helpless, stifled under their woolly volume of words. They spoke unctuously to his ear, and he suspected the honesty of some of their sentiments; he was, indeed, prepared to argue on their initial objection; but when his aunt propounded the second, he knew that no argument would avail him. This view concerning the marriage of cousins came as a surprise. He fell back in spirit upon the need for action. He shrank from action instinctively, yet knew that only by defiant deeds could he ever win his object against such opposition. The thought of deeds depressed him, for they meant actions that would bring chagrin, if not actual sorrow, to others. He had never done anything to bring sorrow to another person in his life. But it was clear that he must trouble these people in the future. It would certainly be necessary to prove to them that they had misjudged him and slighted a character quite strong enough to take by force what was denied by opinion. For, after all, his uncle and aunt only represented themselves.

James found his thoughts mastering him and awakening a condition of agitation that was really hysterical, though he knew it not. He felt the need to leave his relations immediately, and rose to do so.

"I can't talk about it now," he said. "We seem to look at this affair from such opposite points of view. But, of course, I'm not in the least convinced about it—you wouldn't expect me to be."

"We only ask you to turn it quietly and prayerfully over in your mind, James."

"I know, Uncle Nathan. I quite understand. I see it a good deal clearer than you probably think I do—I see it only too clear as a matter of fact. But I'm not going to change—not by a fraction. The things I feel for Anstice and she feels for me are far, far beyond any shadow of changing."

Nobody answered him, and he rose and prepared to leave them. He was very upset; his eyes stared and rolled; his voice ran up to the shrill notes of a creature in pain.

"You don't realise—you don't understand in the least what we feel—it's terrible of you—terrible!" he cried, and then departed.

Mrs. Mortimer watched him from the window.

"That'll do for a start," she said. "Now it's up to Pascoe, and he'd better get on with it."

And James, scarcely seeing where he walked, also knew where the danger lay. For a few yards he hastened in the direction where, close at hand, his rival dwelt; then his feet slowed, and irresolution brought him to a full stop, both in body and mind. Misery sat upon his countenance and anger struggled with reason.

He lost heart presently; it was always easy for him to lose heart. He asked himself whether he was worthy of Anstice, and assured himself that he was. He craved for a sympathetic spirit who would listen to this contemplated injustice and protest against it. Yet he felt in no mood to discuss the situation with anybody. He did not even desire to see Anstice at this moment. He flung himself down high up on the hill, where jasione and orange-red lotus made beauty on the turf amid the foundations of mine buildings now almost hidden under the green. Whortleberries were ripening, and their purple made a harmony with the silver lichens that crusted the stones and wound through the integument of the heath. He crushed a berry on his Sunday trousers and cared not.

From this point of vision—himself invisible beneath a broken wall—James marked his Aunt May and Anstice start presently to Princetown. They were taking tea with a neighbour. Jane Bond, his Aunt Sarah's maid,

also set off, and James idly watched her. She soon left the road, and he saw her wander by the leat and meet a tall figure there. Then he mused on Jane's love affair with the younger Jack Bascombe from Nun's Cross, and doubted not that Little Jack would also have to suffer.

Presently he determined to see his Uncle Nathan again, for in his mind there moved a shadowy conviction that, despite his words, the father of Anstice did not wholly echo her mother's opinion. He felt that, if Nathan were even neutral, the case might take a better turn. Where another man had seen at once that he must fight single-handed for what he wanted, and count on none but the girl herself to help him, James yearned for any spark of hope, or offer of aid, to put steel into his own initiative. This instinct took him back to Nathan Mortimer, now that he knew he was alone.

But parlour and kitchen were empty, and James guessed that Mr. Mortimer had retired to slumber, as was his wont on Sunday afternoon. He stood silent, therefore, hesitated whether he should call out, but decided not to do so. On second thoughts, he knew very well that sympathy from his uncle would not be of the least value against opposition from his aunt.

In a sick and insufferable mood he returned home; already he began to hate himself for his own weakness, feeling, through a sort of crushing intuition, that he was not the man to cut this knot, and, by anticipation, suffering self-shame before he had fairly earned it.

He turned home at length, and presently poured out his tribulations to his mother.

CHAPTER V

NUN'S CROSS

THERE are two orders of ancient human monuments on Dartmoor: the pre-historic evidences of man's earliest occupation and the mediæval remains that date from Tudor times. The Neolith has left his cairns, pounds and the foundations of his lodges; to the mediaeval stannators do the ruined smelting-houses bear testimony, with many a ridge of broken granite, where once the miners streamed for alluvial tin. The Christian symbol also occurs, roughly wrought in granite on wild heaths and lonely hills, to mark some place held sacred, to indicate an ancient path, or guide the wayfaring monk of old on his bleak journey by the Abbot's Way. Of these the most notable relic is Siward's Cross, or Nun's Cross, by which more familiar name the moormen know it. Once the memorial was thrown down and broken; but bygone antiquaries set it up again and clamped the pieces together with iron. It stands now seven feet high, with stumpy arms and weathered front, whereon to the time-worn granite cling lichens grey and gold.

For many years none could read the broken letters that had crumbled upon its face: then came a genius in such matters and deciphered the "Siward," or "Syward," upon the eastern side, and "Boeland," set in two lines under the incised cross that distinguishes the western face. Thus the fragment was retrieved for history, since Siward's Cross is mentioned by the Perambulators of 1240. It is named in a deed confirming grant of lands to the Abbey of Buckland, among which occur the manors of Buckland, Bickleigh and Walkhampton. The last abuts on Dartmoor Forest proper, and Siward's Cross stands by the boundary line of the Northern Quarter upon the old-time Abbot's Way.

It rises yet, the largest cross on Dartmoor, upon the border of Nun's Cross Farm, and David Mortimer enter-

tained the liveliest possible respect for this grey sentinel beside his largest croft; for it represented very practical profit to him. Exceedingly indifferent to its antiquarian significance, he none the less took pains to learn the little known concerning it; for he found, as years passed, an increasing interest and attention bestowed upon the fragment. Tourists went out of the way to visit it, and David contrived to make work beside the cross and be at hand when visitors approached. In his ragged garments chance comers took him for a labourer, and were surprised and impressed to find him learned on the subject of their pilgrimage. They commended his zeal and rewarded him with money, which he was always delighted to accept.

When tourists frequented the moor, David's grey shape might generally be seen, either standing motionless hard-by, or busy at cutting sedge or peat near the uplifted stone; and Barry, who never hesitated to poke fun at his uncle behind the old man's back, said that Mr. Mortimer was a spider always in wait, with a spider's patience, for the human fly who might wander over the heather for a glimpse of their famous local sanctity.

On a fine July morning a party of tourists stood round the cross, and David Mortimer, working within forty yards of it, dropped his peat knife and iron, arose out of a cutting and joined them. His picturesque appearance and genial expression always commanded a hearing. He never minded touching his hat to any man who might pay twopence for the compliment, nor did he scant expressions of courtesy when addressing strangers, though he had none to spare for his acquaintance.

"Your honours be looking at the cross," he said. "If you'll be pleased to step this way I'll show 'e the letters 'pon it. Your sharp eyes will pick 'em up, I don't doubt; though mine be gone too dim to do it nowadays."

He discoursed of the moor after they had done with the cross, and conveyed the idea that he was a servant, not a master.

"Us raise geese up to twelve pounds and more, and there's no calves like ours they'll tell you. Geese get their fatness out o' the peat in my opinion, for peat's full of oil, and wonderful nourishing to all flesh."

A listener asked if the farm belonged to the Duchy, and he answered, guardedly, that it did.

"In the sense that Duchy won't sell, the tenant can't say 'tis his ezacally. All the same, he's got it for the balance of ninety-nine years; and if right was right, I dare say, seeing his father and grandfather made the place and he's built yonder house himself, that it did ought to belong to him. If it had been t'other side that boundary, no doubt the landlord would have made it over as a reward to three generations of good workers and a hundred years of rent, always go'ng up, yet paid to the day; but Duchy's different. Duchy ain't got no bowels, you must know."

"I thought Duchy was popular," said a clergyman of the party, and Mr. Mortimer looked at him curiously, but shook his head.

"Fegs! Duchy don't deserve to be popular," he said. "Duchy's grasping, and very unkind to us old chaps of the soil. In ancient times, you must know, we had a right to all that could do us good from the moor, and a man might shoot a snipe, or blackcock, or any other natural fowl as came along, such as plovers and partridges and so on. His was the right, likewise, to take a rabbit, or hare, and fish in the rivers for his food. But nowadays these things are all took from him, that a little money may be screwed out of 'em, and we're robbed of what the ancient covenants granted. So if a moor-man sees a nest of game-bird's eggs, he'll often just put his foot in it nowadays, and if his dog puts up a leveret, he'll let the dog run her down and eat the creature; and if he sees a salmon stranded in a stickle, be sure that fish won't go on its way rejoicing."

"That's very wrong," declared the clergyman, and David agreed with him.

"Never you spoke a truer word! It is wrong; but who can say it ain't human nature? Duchy's like the peace of God, your reverence—past understanding."

"It does justice without imagination. It's not unjust, but merely unintelligent," suggested a listener.

"They may do justice, according to their lights and narrow sense," admitted David; "but for understanding—no. The servants of the Duchy are jolter-headed, stupid men; and doubtless the far-away prince, that sucks a hundred thousand a year out of Devon and

Cornwall, don't know nothing about the rights and wrongs of the moor. He don't hear of our bright side; only our faults and failings; and be sure he don't know there's cabins on his Dartmoor that would disgrace Ireland."

He proceeded in this strain for ten minutes, but never allowed even his favourite theme to betray him into bitterness before strangers. Then he declared that he must get back to his work, wished them well and foretold fine weather. Thereupon they presented him with half-a-crown and the old man returned to his peat cutting. But he only laboured till the travellers had disappeared in another undulation of the heath; then he dropped his tools and tramped to his home.

It faced the sunrise and looked down over a chaos of rough ground into the distant Mire below. Dry built walls of granite surrounded the farm and a small pent-house of wood framed the front door. Within a spartan severity marked every chamber. To a visitor the house appeared empty of furniture and not only devoid of every adornment and luxury, but wanting in bare necessities also. This however, was not the case, for David had triumphantly proved what constituted necessities and what did not. He had eliminated every convenience that it was possible to live without. The huts of the old stone men were hardly barer than Nun's Cross Farm. More than a Japanese severity marked the parlour to which David now repaired. The floor was bare, the window heavily barred, and the door locked. He opened it and entered a white-washed apartment which contained a solitary chair and a large, roller-topped desk. Beside the desk lay a mat for Mr. Mortimer's feet, made from the skin of a dead collie dog, and on the wall opposite the desk there hung a grocer's almanac of the current year. In the corner lay a few old books, and that was all the room contained. A white blind was drawn down over the window and this he drew up; then he unlocked the desk and sat down in front of it. From a drawer within he pulled out one of half a dozen little canvas bags. Different words were written upon these and he selected that on which he had printed "Come by Chance"—a phrase indicating any unexpected addition to his purse. He emptied this bag of the silver it contained and added his half-crown to it.

He then consulted a note book and made a satisfactory discovery. Visitors to the Cross, during the former year, had produced a total of six pounds and two shillings. This year, though it was still only July and the best months of August and September yet remained, "Come by Chance" already contained three pounds, eight and sixpence.

"If Duchy knowed, the rent would darned soon jump," he said to himself; "but Duchy don't know and shan't know."

He locked up his money, perused figures in account books kept by methods peculiar to himself, then shut up his counting-house, pulled down the blind and locked the door.

It was now noon and he went to the kitchen, an apartment that indicated other occupation than Mortimer's own. A few things that belonged to his cook and housekeeper rendered this room more human, and David himself suffered certain evidences of his family to persist in the houseplace. There were not many, and these had all been gifts from his relations. They could give him nothing that he wanted and any needless additions to life he would have resented. But he accepted a pair of worsted slippers now and again, and since he suffered from faulty circulation, permitted his sister, Sarah, to knit him nightsocks. These she annually renewed. For the rest his gifts stood on the mantelshelf, amongst Mrs. Bascombe's pots and pans, in the shape of a dozen family photographs.

Here were Nathan and May Mortimer, with Anstice as a little child upon her mother's knee. Then came his dead brother-in-law, Mary Worth's husband, a picture of Mary and Damaris taken together, and another of the boys, James and Barry, side by side. A venerable daguerrotype of his parents hung from a nail in the corner beside a grandfather's clock, which he had inherited from them.

Jenny Bascombe, a thin, grey-haired woman, with a face like a hen and a drooping lid to her right eye, spoke as David entered.

"Dinner ban't ready yet," she told him.

"Who said it was? I've got something to say to you."

David went to the hearth, took off his black leggings and heavy boots and set to the fire a pair of large feet in blue worsted stockings.

The woman, engaged in chopping cold roast meat for a stew and mixing vegetable with it, made answer.

"I know what you want to say—'tis about my son."

"And if you know, what do you think?"

Mr. Mortimer thrust his hands up his shirt sleeves. His under vest of wool had shrunk, so that the arms worked up over his elbows, and he was always pulling them down.

"I agree with you most times," she said. "For hard, cruel sense there's not your equal, and time generally proves you're right; but 'tis no manner of use standing out against marriage and taking the line you do when a boy wants to wed a maid. You put your trust in nature against human ways and customs, and nature's been a good friend to you no doubt; but you're up against nature in this. 'Tis all rummage and nonsense to quarrel with giving in marriage and hate women as we know you do. You can't refuse 'em their place as the mothers of men, unless you want the human race to die out."

"I'm not speaking in general," he answered. "I never waste time that way. I think only of how a thing touches me, not whether it's good or bad in itself. I don't care for general principles more than I care for they jimcracks and joanies of yours on the mantelpiece, or them silly likenesses of my people. A thing only interests me if it comes home to me, and I waste not a thought on what leaves mé neither richer nor poorer. Marriage will go on whether I please or whether I don't; and women will go on likewise, because nature needs 'em, and tricks men into wanting 'em. But I'm not talking of marriage, I'm talking of Little Jack, and I don't want him no more if he's going to take Jane Bond."

"Think, however. If you let it happen, she'd be a tower of strength to me. I'm getting old, and a young, active woman about this house would be a Godsend and save money in the long run."

"You cunning devil! Save money—a young woman! Where's the young woman as would save money? No, no, you're good for another ten year yet—so's your husband. You'll see me out, and you know my ways and are broke to 'em and desire nothing better. I'll have no more females than you about the place. If he wants to keep company and distract his mind with foolishness, he

must go. Love-sick men lose half their nature and all their value. I've seen it happen. They don't stand to work as they should, and they put the girl first and their employer second."

"You'll have a deuce of a job to get another chap that does all Little Jack does for his money."

"I've weighed that. 'Tis a choice of evils. But I'm hopeful that I can meet Little Jack and choke him off this foolishness."

Jenny's husband returned at this moment together with another labourer. John Bascombe was a big, hairy man, a year or two younger than his master. His whiskers ran high on his cheek bones and his grizzled head was small for his body. He brought in some eggs and gave them to his wife.

David counted them.

"That's five dozen and one for the week," he said. "Not enough."

"There'll be enough for market by Saturday," promised Jenny.

Then the master turned upon John.

"Have you had speech with Little Jack about this blasted girl?"

"I have not; and don't you get excited, because 'tis bad for your health," answered John. "And I want a bit of offal for the rat trap."

He spoke in a voice that seemed muffled by his big unkempt beard. He was always slow and deliberate.

"More rats! To hell with the rats! I won't have it, I tell you. Rats mean neglect. You're robbing me."

"You can get back on 'em by eating 'em, if you like," replied John. "Men have ate rats before to-day. I dare say, if you was to stew 'em in our snail broth, you'd not know 'em from rabbit."

"I don't cook rat for anybody on God's earth," declared Jenny. "You must draw the line somewhere."

But Mr. Mortimer was not sure.

"We'll see about that," he said. "You'll cook rat, Jenny, if I tell you to. But the disgrace of it is that there should be rats here. All along of this tomfoolery of your son's, I reckon. No doubt he's been mooning after the female for months and not earning his money. I won't have an hour more of this."

"Love will out," answered John, baiting the trap with a piece of rabbit.

"Fegs! Let him get it out, then, and be rid of it. What does he want—a woman and children and misery, or to be free, with money in his purse? Here be I—the living likeness of common-sense—and he's had me before his eyes since his infancy, and knows my opinions."

"Common-sense ain't catching," answered John.

"No; but silliness is, and love's the worst form of silliness; and wickedness is catching, and waste is the worst form of wickedness. If he wastes himself on that slut——"

"She ain't a slut. As young women go, she's all right."

"They're never all right."

A large black-and-white cat came in through the window at this moment, and David regarded it fiercely.

"What's the difference between women and her? If there's a cat and a woman in the house, you'll see 'em behave exactly alike in all that matters. Only the cat's too straight to pretend, and goes his scornful way, and takes all and gives nought; the woman tries to hide what she's doing; but she does it just the same."

"If I may speak, that's going too far," declared Jenny from the stove. "And why you should say such a thing afore me and thicky cat I'm baggered if I can see. I give all and take nought, and well you know it; and there never was a one for mice like her—works because her must, to fill her belly."

"And what's her for, if not to catch the mice you bring about the place, because you're too lazy to sweep up the crumbs?"

"Crumbs! A darned lot of crumbs any mouse finds here—or anybody else."

This apparently acrimonious dialogue annoyed nobody. David thus habitually rebuked John and his wife, and they as often returned snap for snap. They were the best of friends behind their rough speech; but the matter in hand promised to be serious, and John Bascombe knew it.

Mr. Mortimer returned to Little Jack.

"I'll give the dog another half-crown a week to be off this," he said. "It's blackmail and highway robbery, and shows how cussedly his mother have brought him up;

but I'll so far meet him as to give that ruination rise to his money if I hear no more of this vexatious wickedness."

"He won't budge for cash."

"Know-naught fool! Let him go, then. He'll get no character from me."

"He's got his character from me," said Little Jack's mother, "and it's a very good one, as well you know. And if you was a just man, you'd let him bring his wife here to help me, in the proper course of nature; but as you won't, then he'll go; and it's a hard case, and I don't think none the better of you for it."

"As to character," said John. "The world knows that my son have been along with you since he was born. Well, that's character enough. The chap who has satisfied you ever since he begun to work is going to be a treasure to anybody—married or single. I dare say you'd say things against him if you could, but you'd waste your wind, master. For why? Because not a living soul would believe you."

David considered this. He was only annoyed at the growing certainty of losing his man, not in the least at John's comments on the situation.

"Well, even if he goes, it won't be the end of the world," he said; "and if he marries, I shall know I've had the best of him before he fell into destruction."

CHAPTER VI

ON SOUTH HESSARY

Barry Worth strolled to the low masses of granite known as South Hessary Tor, where they stood on the forest boundary-line, a mile from Princetown. For the moment he remained at leisure, and had not yet heard of new work to suit him. He was clever, careless and genial; but an element of reserve belonged to him, and he had proved himself tenacious of his rights on more than one occasion. Life opened before him full of interests—an adventure which he welcomed for its entertainment and its possibilities. At this moment he felt troubled on his brother's behalf, and glowed with genuine resentment of the powers that threatened to come between James and Anstice. But he was shrewd enough to learn from every experience, and perceived that the difficulties now darkening his elder brother's life were such that they might very easily cloud his own. For Barry, among his other interests, was very fond of a girl; and he meant to marry her some day, when in a position to do so. She met him now, for it was her afternoon out, and they kissed and proceeded to the tor.

The day was slowly shadowed, and the distance, rolling in sober undulations to the south, already indicated the coming change. Seaward the horizon had faded from blue to a welter of grey, and above Plymouth slant curtains of rain were falling. But the sun shone on Hessary; the clouds broke into silver beneath it and the blue still predominated. Sunshafts fell afar and flung tracts of light through the increasing heaviness, drenching the dim green of the moor with gold, and flashing gentle colour where the first of the ling began to spread its rose.

Marian Dennis was barmaid at 'The Plume of Feathers,' the most ancient public-house in Princetown. Barry had come to know her through his sister, Damaris, whose friend she was; and now they were secretly engaged,

keeping the fact to themselves for the present at the young man's wish. Instinct rather than any actual motive made him suggest silence. He knew that he could not marry yet awhile, nor, indeed, was he anxious to do so, for his romance found him as self-controlled as usual. They were close friends, and understood each other exceedingly well. Common-sense and transparent honesty were Marian's strong points. She had a big, pleasant face, and was generously, indeed massively, built for such a young woman. Her calling had enlarged her mind, and her experience of men inclined her the more to her sweetheart's clean instincts and native chivalry.

She was clad in a new tweed coat and skirt, with a straw hat round which clung a grey feather, and she carried a blue parasol.

He praised her dress, which he had not seen before. Then they sat together and discussed their affairs. Marian's interest was to know whether he had found any work.

"Not yet. But I can in an hour when I want to. There's another chap in the market besides me, Marian. Little Jack from Nun's Cross has got the sack."

"Little Jack going! Surely Mr. Mortimer hasn't had a quarrel with him?"

"A very bitter one. Little Jack's fallen in love, and love affairs out our way come to a bad end seemingly. Anyhow Uncle David won't hear of it and Little Jack won't give up Jane Bond; so he's fired out. It's things like that make me reckon we're wise to keep our mouths shut for the minute, though the moment you wish it known, it shall be known."

"I'm not in any hurry. That's Frog End down there, isn't it?"

She regarded a knot of little houses on the side of a hill beneath them. Round this undulation the leat drew a thread of silver and fields extended in a patchwork above the cots.

"Yes, that's where I came to grief. Was a bit too slow in the hayfield. Frog End faces north, you see, and the people there think a bit bleak in consequence. Now, just round the corner of the hill, is White Works, and us at White Works face the sun and looks at things more hopefully."

"Farmer White was in 'The Plume' three days ago talking to a man or two about you. Of course, they didn't know we're friends, and they said out you were clever enough, but lazy; and White said you were impudent, else he'd not have turned you going."

"Impudent I was," confessed Barry. "I happened to be in a wonderful good temper—thinking of you I reckon—and I'd knocked off to have half a pipe, and White surprised me and cussed furious, and I laughed and said the crop was as thin as an old man's hair and not worth the cutting anyway. He owned 'twas poor and said, very truly, that there was so much the more reason for saving it before the weather turned. And then I said it was the man's own fault it was poor. 'You're the sort,' I said, 'who want something for nothing. You won't take your beasts off the grass by April and still think to get hay worth mentioning. The cattle can't eat it twice,' I told him, 'and you know it ought to be cut by mid-July at latest; then the after-math comes on in time for valuable autumn and early winter grazing.'"

"Well, all that's true enough."

"It is; but it wasn't any business of mine to tell him. And he soon showed it wasn't. In fact he gave me the sack right away and said I was there to mow, not to teach him. 'You won't get anything for nothing either,' White said to me, 'and you won't get wages for sitting smoking, when you ought to be at work.' He had me there all right."

Marian frowned.

"You mustn't do it again, however. Next year I reckon we should begin to think about our plans, Barry. Such a clever chap as you ought to be doing more and getting bigger money."

"I ought; and I'm on the look out for it. I may go farther afield."

"Not too far."

"No fear. But perhaps down to the in-country—Tavistock way,"

"I'll never see you then."

"I might find just the right shop for my sort of cleverness and be able to marry right away. There's nothing very likely just round here anyway."

"I never thought of you very far off all the same. I won't have you go too far."

"We'll see what happens. Nothing like adventures. But you know very well you'll have the last word in anything I may do."

She put her big hands on his shoulders and kissed him.

"I know that all right. I'm lucky. The girl who took your fancy got a prize and I often long to tell people. Damaris guesses it, I believe, though I'm always careful enough. Now she's walking out along with Ben Halfyard, she's getting sharp."

"We'll mark time a bit, however. You see there's the future to think about, and if one thing's more certain sure than another, it is that my Uncle David would drop me like a ton of bricks if he thought I was after a girl. He happened to meet James and Anstice the day after she'd said 'Yes' to him; and the old man gave them hell. He must leave his money to somebody some day and it's no good falling out with him if I can help it."

"I see that very clear," she said. "Have you got any idea what Mr. Mortimer's worth? It's a very favourite subject in the bar of an evening, and some say he must be good for five thousand and some pitch it as high as ten."

"A very favourite subject with us, too," answered Barry. "In fact I'm often tired to death to hear my mother and Uncle Nathan and Aunt Sarah going on about it. But nobody really knows anything, except that Uncle David's a miser. Whether he's made a big pile by being one, or only a little pile, none can say; but seeing what he spends and what his cattle must fetch, he ought to be pretty snug."

"He'll live till he's a hundred I expect."

"He won't. He's not so tough as he looks. He's got weak spots. Not that I'm the sort to wait for dead men's shoes; but a little waiting won't hurt. They all reckon I get on best with the old devil, because I don't care what I say to him. But that's not the true reason. The reason is that I can pretend a bit cleverer than my folk. And it's not all pretence neither. I do admire Uncle David in a way—not for hoarding, but for his strength of will. If he'd only poured that terrible will power into

something else, he might have been the leading man in the place."

"Money's no use left in bags for certain," said Miss Dennis.

"No. No sense in getting a great head of steam if you don't let it out to drive the machine. He's got all his driving power wasted and lives in rags and eats orts and sees the money breed—all for nothing."

"His pleasure is in the stuff itself. To spend it on getting power wouldn't be any pleasure to him I expect."

"Yet I've heard him say he could buy up this man or that ten times over—men he'll touch his hat to! I believe it's a pleasure to him to touch his hat to people and know all the time he's got a shilling for every one of their half-pence."

"You'd say that was being a fool."

"Of course he is a fool from our point of view. A hunks must be a fool; and yet, if you look at it, see what he gets for nothing. We all grovel to him really, though we pretend we don't. We run if he beckons and do any mortal thing he bids. Uncle Nathan and my mother say he's the head of the family and must be obeyed; but that's all nonsense. We obey him and cringe, because he's rich and can't take it with him. If he could take it with him, we shouldn't go across the road to favour him. And he knows that well enough."

"He might leave it all away from your people."

"Just as likely as not."

"Has he got any friends?"

"Not that we know about."

"Or any fancies—anything that he admires or thinks well of?"

"Nothing but money."

"Here's the storm," said Marian, "and you said it wasn't coming."

Stealthily the rain crept upon them, and they had not observed the hills fade away into it, or the white road winding westerly disappear in the gathering gloom. The first heavy drops had hardly fallen cold upon their faces when brusquely, abruptly, it was pouring. They got to windward of the rocks; then Barry decided that they must run for it.

But Marian was not built to run, and refused.

"I can't do impossible things," she said. "I'm in for a proper wetting now, and had better get home. You ought to have watched the weather."

"Hang it, don't say you can't run!"

"Not for you, or anybody."

She took her stately way, and would not put up the parasol she carried. Barry, who was very fleet, growled as he turned his coat collar about his ears, and she, feeling her new gown getting wet through on the shoulders, blamed him again, but not severely.

He begged her to enter the wood when they reached it; but she declined.

"You'd best be off before I get snappy," she said.

"You are snappy," he answered, "and I'll never believe you couldn't run if you liked."

"Well, you run, then. I don't want your company no more. We can't walk up the road together, anyway, because we might meet somebody."

"They'd only hear us having a row if we did."

"I'm not having a row. I'm only telling you you ought to have known the weather better—a moor-man like you."

"My dear girl, what's weather to me? Those that are feared of the weather should look after the weather. I didn't know you were frighted of a drop of rain."

"I'm frighted for my hat, not myself. Now my feather's done for."

"I'll buy you another—a whole fit-out."

"What with?"

"Well, I'd better be gone, I think."

"That's what I'm saying, if only you'd listen."

He left her and turned homeward to the moor, while Marian set off for Princetown. She did not live at 'The Plume of Feathers,' but at one of four tall tenements a quarter of a mile away on the shoulder of the hill. 'New London,' as the buildings are called, was erected for the miners at White Works; but hardly had the houses been completed when need for them ceased. Local people now occupied them all.

Isaac Dennis was a road-mender; his wife, a monthly nurse. They were people of independent spirit and

simple mind. Her mother mourned Marian's hat, and helped to dry it. The girl was cheerful, and did not hint at the breeze with Barry Worth. The rain had stopped when she reached her home, and she joined her parents at tea before returning to her work.

CHAPTER VII

A BILLET FOR BARRY

At the leat, on the way home, a man shouted to Barry Worth, and he saw a familiar figure beckoning on the hill southward. It was Little Jack from Nun's Cross, and now he made haste while the other waited for him.

Little Jack stood six feet four, and was so lean that he looked half a foot taller. His small head, like his father's, was perched on a long neck; but Little Jack shaved clean, and the Adam's apple in his throat bulged largely upon the sight. A joker at 'The Plume of Feathers' said that Little Jack's head and carcase looked like a billiard ball at the point of a cue. He was a fair man, of great physical strength and extreme simplicity of character. Even the stupidest sharpened their wit on his strange exterior and slow intelligence.

"Little Jack," said Barry, pursuing his own thoughts, "when you want a new experience, you have a row with your girl. It's always well worth it for the sake of making up again."

Jack Baseombe was willing to receive information from everybody.

"I'll bear it in mind, Mister Barry; but how do you know, if I may ask?"

"Not from personal experience, Jack—I swear that," replied the other hastily. "But I've heard chaps say so."

"I ask from no disrespect to you," replied Little Jack, "but because of what I'm going to say next. I'm leaving Nun's Cross, because your uncle can't stand the thought of me being tokened to Jane Bond. Awful language he's used, and offered me half-a-crown on to my money to stop. But I've growed to feel so terrible addicted to Jane Bond that money's nought against her. And I asked you about lovers quarrelling because it sounded to me as if you might have had such a thing happen to you; but if you've got any feelings of that sort, then nothing can come of it."

"Nothing can come of what, old man?"

"Nothing can come of what your Uncle David wants for to say to you. In a word, he's ill and fretted, and wishes to see you. He knows you're free, and is minded to offer you to work along with him; but such is his famous hatred against females, that if by ill chance you're tokened——"

"Tokened? Good Lord, not me! Leave that sort of things for you chaps with money in your purses. Old bird wants me—eh? That's an idea."

"Father thinks it is so. Father reads master like a book, to say it without offence."

"It would take a smarter man than your father to read my uncle, I reckon."

"Perhaps it would, then. My father is a very good father to me, but not what you might call a smart man. I grant that."

"No, Little Jack; Uncle David's a deep old file, and none of us know how deep."

"Well, he wants you this instant moment. He's ill with a tissick in his chest—got it cutting peat, my mother says. And he must see you this very day. Cussing Duchy, he is, and damning me and other good characters. And I hope, if you can do it, you'll explain that if a man feels the love of woman, that's no reason why you should call him 'a stramming, great God-forsaken son of a louse.' I've got my self-respect and, though a bit of a mump-head where learning is concerned, yet—there 'tis—I'm no worse than a great many others, and very honest and even-tempered; and to be called a son of a louse afore my parents is going too far."

"You know what a hatch-mouthed old beggar he is when he's riled. Don't let it worry you, Little Jack. It's a compliment really. He wouldn't be so vexed if he didn't know what a valuable man you are."

Little Jack stared at this soothing theory.

"By Gor!" he said. "That's along of having brains! Now I shouldn't wonder if you was right. 'Tis the thought of losing me makes him dress me down so cruel."

"Of course it is. If you weren't a jolly good worker, d'you think he'd care a straw about you?"

"I'll tell my mother that, and Jane Bond also. 'Tis a

very witty thought indeed, Master Barry, and I'm much beholden to you. 'Tis his fearful vexation as I be going—I see it all now. I do call that a masterpiece ! "

" Say I'll come up after supper, and I'll get my mother to make some soup and fetch it along."

" He shall know it," promised Little Jack.

Then they parted, and some hours later Barry, with a pint of good soup in a can, ascended to Nun's Cross, knocked out his pipe at the outer door, for David hated tobacco, and then entered the farm.

His uncle was sitting before a peat fire hawking and spitting. Only a rushlight guttered on the mantel-shelf and threw a reddish illumination round the fireplace. Mrs. Bascombe took the soup, and the invalid decreed that he would drink it at once. Then, while it was being heated, he began about himself.

" I'm finger-cold—can't catch heat do what I will. Came over me quite sudden when I rose up this morning."

" 'Twill go again as sudden, I expect, uncle. Just a bit of a chill cutting peat and getting your feet wet, because you won't have your boots mended."

" You're a liar ! My boots be sound as a bell. 'Tis worry—worry, because that woman's ungrateful dog of a son's leaving me. I've made the creature, and now he puts a tousled rag of a girl afore me and be going."

" Well, I daresay he wants a change. You'll find as good as Little Jack."

" There was such another ; but he's gone to Tor Royal, to Duchy. Blast Duchy ! It draws the young fellows, God knows why. If they understood Duchy as I do——"

He coughed and cleared his throat.

" When a tough mind fights against weakness of the flesh, it's hell," he said. " I've got to cut my coat according to my cloth in future and waste good money on contrivances to keep my heart going. I hate it."

" It isn't wasted money at all. You can't get any fun out of your money if you're ill. It will pay you all right to spend a bit on your health. Why not ? "

" Because to spend is to hurt myself, ain't it ? How should a bottle of brandy be any good to my belly if it's made my heart bleed buying it ? And I—as never touched liquor."

" Yes, you have, my old dear—at Christmas time and at Court Leet, when you pay your rent and Duchy stands the dinner at Duchy Hotel."

" Do I pay for it ? Let them as be fools offer me drink and, not being a fool myself, I'll take what they offer. I've never refused anything in my life. But what I get for nought fattens, because I take it with a contented heart ; what I've got to pay for is harder to digest, because it's stuffing my own money down my neck. Have I saved for this—to be a bed-lier presently, and see my money going in physic ? What's life at that gait ? "

" Well, you're frank about it. But you'll be all right in twenty-four hours, and if you're not, you'd best to see the doctor. And what d'you want with me anyway, Uncle David ? "

The invalid asked a question in his turn.

" Why did Farmer White chuck you ? "

" Caught me wasting my time and thinking, when I ought to have been mowing."

" What was you thinking of then ? Not a woman ? "

" Oh, dear no—haven't got no use for them."

" If you have, there's an end of it. No friends among 'em even ? "

" I ain't much of a hand at making friends—feel friendly to everybody, men or women. Safety in numbers, uncle. You ain't much of a hand at friends, are you, now ? "

" I've got one friend as be worth all the pack of the people. Who's the strongest, cutest, sharpest man in the North Quarter of the Forest ? Tell me that."

" You are I should reckon."

" And so should I. David Mortimer's my best friend, I believe, and I'd sooner have him for a friend than any man ever I met."

Barry laughed.

" There's a lot of other people besides yourself would like to be your good friends, no doubt."

" And because they can't, they speak ill of me—women more than men."

" Why should they speak ill of you ? If they do, 'tis for envy, not honesty."

" Envy is another name for woman," snapped Mortimer.

"They envy everything, from their neighbours' hats to their neighbours' husbands. Think I haven't marked that. Fegs! a satisfied woman would be the wonder of nature."

"And who's to blame for that but the men?" asked Jenny Bascombe. "You take darned good care us shan't be satisfied. In this world the men have the apple and the women the core most times, for all I can see."

"You can't see far, then; and you'd best to clear out and take the candle with you," answered David; "I want to speak to my nephew, Barry."

Mrs. Bascombe gave him his soup, then lifted the candle and retired, while the young man's uncle proceeded as he stirred his drink. The room was dark save for the red eye of the peat fire and a dancing aureola of dim blue flame above it.

"I don't think none too well of you, and you mustn't fancy that I do; but I'm losing Little Jack, and if you like to come to me and try your luck, you can. Plenty of hard work and no time for mooning; but you shall have good money. If you'll work for a month for nought but your keep, then, if you suit me and Bascombe, I'll give you a pound a week—fancy wages and more'n any young man's worth that I ever met. But so it shall be, so long as you please me and bide single and think single. You see what hankering after a woman has done for Little Jack and your own fool of a brother."

Barry forgot himself in sorrow for James; but he was guarded.

"Uncle Nathan and Aunt May won't let James get engaged to Anstice. They've got other ideas for her. They want for her to take 'Gentleman' Pascoe."

"Do they? Then it's out of the frying-pan into the fire, and I hope the girl will withstand 'em."

"I thought you liked Pascoe, uncle."

"A very vain and self-righteous abomination is Charles Pascoe," answered the old man, "and why you should have thought I liked him, I can't say. It shows what your thinking be worth; and if you come to me, you'll have to think less and work more. Pascoe! As hateful a whited sepulchre as ever I smelt. God help the woman that weds him. She'll wish herself free in a week, and dead in a

month. I hate the women, and have always made that pretty clear, I believe; but I never hated any one of 'em so wicked that I wished them married to him."

Barry was surprised.

"Why, I thought he was universally respected and all that. I don't like him; but my mother's always said it was a bad mark against me that I didn't."

"Just what she would say, being of the sex that only sees skin-deep into anything. Pascoe's a mask—a sham-built object to the very face of him. Some faces are facts and some are masks. His face is a falsehood built to hide truth. People think that man ought to have an angel's wings sprouting from his shoulders; but I know he ought to have a devil's tail sprouting somewhere else. That's Pascoe."

Barry showed interest and comprehension.

"I believe there's a lot of people hide the truth of themselves behind their faces," he said.

"There are—I'm one. But I don't do it for fraud. 'Tis accidental with me, because my head-bones show through the skin and my countenance be cast in a grin, though Lord knows there's little enough to grin at, unless it be the folly of the fools. People as I don't know grin back when they see me; but they mighty soon stop grinning when they hear me."

"It's very kind of you to offer me this billet, Uncle David," said Barry presently. "You'd wish me to live at home, I reckon?"

"No fay! And spend half your time going and coming? If you come to me, you come to me. It won't be like home, because we don't waste my substance and live on the fat of the land and swill soup like this here, that my spoon stands up in very nearly. You know my ways, and you've got to fall in with 'em. I'm a natural man and live a natural life. I was born and bred on the moor, and I take what the moor offers and find it enough. You'll have no more and no less than I have; and you'll drink my snail broth and my herby tea, and eat my bread baked by Jenny, and all the rest of it. I eat to live."

"You haven't got much use for shops, we know."

"For why? Because most of the things in shops you can very well go without. Did the old men, who lived on

Dartymoor before the blasted Duchy clawed hold of it, have shops? Did they go to Edwards and his smelly hole at Princetown for jam and pickles and candles, and dried fish and tinned poisons? No, they lived off the moor, same as me."

"But civilisation, uncle?"

"Be damned to civilisation! Civilisation have turned mankind into the pinnikin, soft trash it mostly is. Where do civilisation beat me? Food and warmth—that's all we want to make the machine work."

"There's light?"

"Well, the sun's in heaven, ain't it? For our weakness, and because Jenny Basecombe swears she needs 'em, I make light. The pith of the rexens* and a bit of mutton fat makes a rushlight; and unless you want to turn night into day, like this generation, that's enough for all needs. We rise afore the sun and set with him here; and so will you."

Barry nodded and praised the plan, while he made mental reservations. It occurred to him that his own private relaxations would probably begin after his uncle and the household of Nun's Cross had gone to bed.

"A very wise rule, I daresay," said he.

"Wise or otherwise, it's my rule," declared Mortimer. "And by the same token, I ought to be in bed now."

"I'll come, and thank you for giving me a try. I like farming well."

"Next Monday week, then. That monkey goes o' Saturday week."

"Shall I give 'e a hand up to bed?"

"No."

He raised his voice and shouted to Jenny, who was in a lesser kitchen leading out of the house-place: "Be the hot brick in my bed?"

She entered at his call.

"Ess, master."

"Take that can back to your mother," said David, handing over the soup-can, and Barry picked it up. He smiled unseen and asked a question:

"Shall I say you found it did you good, uncle?"

But to this David deigned no reply whatever. He

* *Rexens* = rushes.

grunted, rose from his chair and went out of the room. They heard him shuffle heavily up the bare, wooden staircase.

"Won't he want a light?" asked the young man.

"Not him. Light or dark's all one to him."

"I'm coming to take Little Jack's place, Jenny."

"So I guessed, Master Barry. And I wonder if you'll keep it so long as my son did."

"I wonder, Jenny."

Then Worth set out for home.

CHAPTER VIII

BARRY HINTS AT ACTION

When Barry told his mother next morning of the thing that had happened to him, she was much concerned, and when James and Damaris listened to the matter at breakfast next day, they also, knowing their uncle, felt the experiment dangerous. Mary Worth became almost tearful as she considered the hazards to spring from such an arrangement.

"I'm cruel sorry about this," she said, "for, with your Uncle David, the only way to keep his friendship is to bide out of his sight as much as possible. I'd always hoped you was down in his will for a good dollop of money, because he hadn't got so much to say against you as t'others—almost friendly towards you, you might say; but the better he gets to know any human, the less he likes 'em, most times. His steel's rusting a bit now; he ain't the man he was, and a time is coming when he'll have to go. It may be soon or it may be late; you never know with a queer heart; but if you'd only kept away from him, very like it would have paid you to do so. Now——"

"All that's best in you—all we like and ordinary people like—he'll hate," declared James. "You know what he is, Barry, and if you was to bend to his will and run your life according to his plan, you'd very soon be a sort of chap that nobody had any use for, any more than they have got use for him."

"Fancy you turning into a miser, Barry, and counting your pence!" laughed his sister.

The young man listened to them with a smile, and the darker the picture they drew, the greater appeared his entertainment.

"You're all wrong and give me no credit for sense," he presently replied. "It's only an adventure; and what's the good of being young if you don't have adventures?"

" It's an adventure that may cut short your chance to have any more adventures," explained James. " If you'd kept on the windy side of him and had him thinking well of you, very like he'd have left you money enough to have adventures worth mentioning; but once you are at Nun's Cross, he'll find out you are pretty much like other young men, and then he'll hate you, same as he hates everything young."

Barry did not immediately reply. He weighed with himself how much he should confess of his purposes and how much conceal. Finally he made a guarded admission.

" You can pretend," he said.

" Some might, and hoodwink the man; you're not that sort," answered his mother; but Damaris knew Barry better.

" Yes, he is that sort. He could fox a lot of people, Barry could," she declared frankly; " but he couldn't fox Uncle David. Nobody could. He's too suspicious and too pitiless."

" That's where the adventure comes in," explained her brother. " You say nobody could fox Uncle David, Damaris; and no girl could, we'll grant."

" Oh yes, they could—some of them," she answered. " A girl would be more likely to do it than a boy, I reckon, because it's more natural to us to be cunning than to boys; but no girl would ever get the chance; he hates 'em far too much to listen to 'em."

James took a deeper view.

" I shouldn't like for you to fox him," he said. " If you was to do that, it would be bad for your character, Barry, and make you sly and doubtful to other men. But he's a great deal stronger than you, and it's a lot more likely that he would bend you to see with his eyes and train you up to his beastly opinions and ruin you, than that you would deceive him."

Barry, however, feared no such thing.

" He's a walking lesson against all that he practises, and you needn't worry for me. He won't change me, and if I can't stick him, then I shall jolly soon chuck him."

" That's what will happen," said Mary, " and that's what makes me troubled about it. You won't stop more

than your month, but that month is very likely going to spoil all your future chances."

"I hope better, mother," he answered, and left them. He was idle till he should begin work at Nun's Cross, and now pursued his private plans and strolled over the moor to see Mr. Mortimer and inquire if he were better.

James went part of the way with him on his road to Princetown. The elder was very gloomy, and found some consolation in Barry's sympathetic attitude to his tribulations.

He spoke of his own affairs now.

"I haven't got any secrets from you, Barry, and I may tell you that, though we don't meet in the open since her people turned me down so wickedly, Anstice and me are together a good bit."

"Why the devil not? If you had more pluck in you, you'd talk to Aunt May and Uncle Nathan straight. 'Tis them that matter—no good whining to other people."

"I can talk to him, but not to her. She's a hateful woman, and behind all her sighs and her smelling bottle, you know she's iron really and no more heart than an axe."

Barry considered.

"For a soft chap like you talking's no good. Anybody can talk you down, or Anstice either. You're like a couple of harmless birds that only want to be left alone. Well, there's but one way to be left alone, and that's to get married. And you can't do it by force, because you haven't got the dash to flout 'em openly; so you've got to do it by stealth."

"But the injustice! Why should we be driven to do crooked things and run counter to the family? We want to be open and honest—we're built so, and it's a wicked thing, in my opinion, that I should even have to think of being shifty."

Barry laughed.

"It's the only way for your sort to get on, all the same. You can't stand up to people's faces to win what you want, so, if they deny you, you've got to go behind 'em and win it. There's dogs like that. I don't see anything crooked about it. You want Anstice and she wants you, and the only reason against is that another man wants

her, too—'Gentleman' Pascoe—and her parents are on his side, because he's richer and more important than you. So it's you and her against them."

"Of course they say she'd be a lot happier in the long run with him; but I know different. He might suit some girls; but Anstice loves me, and nobody that loves me could love Charles Pascoe."

"Well, you're up against it, and I'm your side; and if we can't win out against 'em, it's a pity, Jimmy. You've got to tighten up a bit, that's all, and hit back. You take it so mild. If anybody had said I wasn't good enough for a girl, or man enough, I'd damn soon show them all about it—and rub it in, too."

"You would; but we're built different. I want to be fair and just to everybody, and I've thought a lot for the other side. They've got a case against me, because I'm naturally a quiet man and built to follow rather than lead. And if Anstice had been in two minds and divided between me and Mr. Pascoe, I don't see how I could have pushed this against her parents. And if I'd been another kind of man, with any black marks against me, I'd have weighed the justice of the case; but you can't fairly say they can bring faults against me."

Barry grew impatient.

"You make me wild," he answered. "You talk and think like a bread-and-butter pudding would, if it could. And it *is* a fault in you to be so meek and mild. If people go about asking to be trod on, there's plenty always ready to oblige 'em. It's no good arguing about it; but I warn you of one thing: if you're always so devilish ready to see other people's point of view, you mustn't be surprised if they don't bother themselves about yours. It's humbug in a way. You ought to stick to your opinions, if you think they're worth sticking to."

"I don't trust my judgment enough, I expect," admitted his brother.

"No—so you needn't be surprised if other people won't. You've got to keep your mouth shut and get on with it, else they'll argue you out of the girl altogether. She's same as you; and your sort, as I say, if they can't be plucky, have got to be tricky. We'll have a yarn about this and hatch a plot. You say to yourself that you

want a thing nobody's any right to deny you, and swear to yourself you're going to have it, and defy these people, and show 'em you're not the poor tool they think you. Then, when they find you were too clever for them, they'll respect you and very soon sing a different song."

"I don't know about that. If I had my way, they'd hate me and never forgive me."

"And if you don't have your way, you'll never forgive yourself; and which is worse? What does it matter what Aunt May and Uncle Nathan think, or Pascoe, or anybody on God's earth, if you're married to Anstice?"

"That's true, certainly. And I'm pretty sure she would feel the same; but it would be a cloud for ever if she quarrelled with her father and mother."

"Fathers and mothers have got to listen to reason, like other people. While they're talking, you act; that's the best way to shut their mouths."

"It may have to come to it."

"The sooner the better, if you're in earnest about her. And I'll tell you another thing: if you was to snap your fingers at everybody and run off with her, Uncle David would think a lot more of you than he does—not for marrying, which he hates, but for showing you know how to get what you want. He's a great respect for people who get what they want, because they're so rare. You turn it over, and don't whine and fiddle about for weeks till you've lost your chance; do it now. I've got a plan for that matter. I'll tell you to-night."

"It's a great thing for me to have you my side, Barry."

"It's a greater to have yourself on your side. Uncle David told me yesterday that he was his own best friend; and he couldn't have a better. There's a lot of sense in that."

"I'll talk to Anstice. We planned yesterday for her to go early to Princetown for her mother. She'll be waiting for me at Tor Royal plantation now."

"Take a high hand, then, and tell her you're going to see the thing through before Michaelmas."

With this advice Barry turned over the heath to Nun's Cross, and his brother, proceeding by the road, soon reached the shelter of the woods, where Anstice met him. They kissed; but it was characteristic of her infirmity

that even a kiss seemed a guilty pleasure to Anstice now, nor did it taste as of old to James.

They felt wounded in their love. They resented the attitude of those concerned, but they were not capable of lasting anger; their present emotion was rather one of bewilderment.

Anstice, however, declared a little triumph.

"Mother never guessed for a minute I'd see you. She thought I'd be at Princetown long before you were on the way. And so I should have been. I've bided here for an hour!"

"And why not?" he asked. "If your people take this unkind way, we must be brave and stand up to life. We know what we want, and we're going to get it, Anstice."

"I wish I had such courage as what you've got."

"A poor look-out if a man don't show courage at such a time."

"'Tis all so puzzling. Everybody does puzzle me, for that matter, but you. You're so straight, and look at things as they are; but mother, and even father—you can't get any plain answer from them. However, we've got ourselves, and as long as we've got ourselves I won't fret. I'm happy by nature, I'm sure."

They lapsed into lovers' talk, avoiding the issue by instinct, as they avoided all painful issues.

"You always seem like a little robin—that cheerful in every weather," he said.

"As cheerful, but not as brave as a robin."

"I believe the right way with most troubles is to forget them, Anstice. Then they can't hurt."

"I do—with most. But this trouble—there's no forgetting this."

"We shall, in time. We shall look back at it and see how we met it. It's no doubt the biggest thing that ever happened to us, and we must meet it in a big way. Nothing will make me stop loving you, and such love as ours can get round anything."

His eyes caught sight of a wood strawberry, and he stopped and picked it for her. She thanked him, as though for a precious gift, and they forgot everything but themselves. James spoke presently about gifts in general, for he was a generous as well as a sensitive spirit.

"Funny about giving things. You can take a berry from me as if it was a treasure, but I've often felt that, if you offer most people a gift, it makes 'em feel as if they was superior to you. There's some as will scarce take the trouble to thank you. They'll lose a gift, even, and be bored if you venture to ask 'em whether they've got it."

"There's frosty people like that, I know," she said.

"Yes, I believe there's something in some people that makes 'em read wrong motives into gifts. They think you expect something back; and it's very frosty, as you say, and I don't give gifts now like I used to. I wouldn't give Uncle David a gift for the world. He'd remember it against me ever after."

"Yet, if anybody gives me anything, I never forget it to their credit, and feel terribly kindly to them."

"You would; you're built that way, being a grateful girl; but there's no other like you in the world. The big people think it's enough honour to you if they take your gift, and I shan't give no more, except to small people, who seldom are thought upon."

He told her presently of his speech with his brother, and she was much interested.

"It puts me all in a flutter to think of such things—Barry's such a fearless chap. But what you say, I'll do, James."

"I feel we shan't get no forwarder by talking," he declared, echoing Barry. "The time will soon come for action, Anstice, and I shan't hold back if you're willing to go forward. He even talked of Michaelmas; but perhaps——"

"Why, that's only a few months off! Perhaps it won't come to such a desperate thing as that. Father might be got round, I believe."

"He's nought, alone."

She admitted this. The thought of a plot excited her; but it frightened her also. They abandoned the subject, put the uneasy future away from them and returned to the present.

At Princetown Anstice went on her way and James entered the general store, where he worked behind the counter. A boy had just begun to take down the shutters, for it was now eight o'clock.

CHAPTER IX

AT STRANE STEPS

The old tenement farm of the Pascoes was the most considerable dwelling at White Works and the only one not already mentioned. It lay a little beyond the hamlet, among its own fields. The land belonging to it surmounted the ridge behind and flowed down northerly upon the other side. It was called Strane Steps, after a ford over the little river immediately beneath it, and the place had belonged to the Westaways once, though now for a hundred years in the possession of the Pascoes.

Strane Steps farm-house had a wide, whitewashed, homely face that pointed east. It peered with eyes that blinked at dawn from under heavy thatches. The walls were two feet thick and impervious to cold or heat, so that the dwelling maintained an even temperature, even as its master did. Above it ascended two Scotch firs with weatherbeaten heads and red stems, that leant towards each other, as though for common support. Alder bushes and white-thorns made a splash of snow-white bloom beside the house; grass meadows ascended behind it. A great mound of peat, well dried and of excellent quality, stood under the shelter of an open byre, while in the yard a cart appeared with a load of sedges, brought green off the moor for litter. A little garden of flowers, walled off from the farm-yard, extended along the face of the dwelling, while sloping beneath it lay an acre of potatoes, an acre of ripening oats, and half an acre of cabbage and kale.

Here, in comfort and plenty, lived Charles Pascoe, styled 'Gentleman' out of respect for his nice language, great dignity and varied virtues. He was forty-three and a bachelor, with one surviving aunt on his father's side, who kept house for him, admired him, and delighted in his prosperity. She was getting old now, and took an obsolescent line with the male. She held that her sex should minister and remain subordinate. Rebecca Pascoe

rejoiced in her nephew and pointed with pride to him, because he justified the ways of God to men.

"You can't help seeing it when you consider Charles," she used to declare. "He seems to sum up so much. I find him strengthen my faith every time I look at him—not, God knows, that it wants strengthening. But you feel with Charles the truth of that wise saying, 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all other things shall be added.' That's what he did from the time he was ten years old, or even earlier, and what is the result? The result you see in Charles."

Her nephew deprecated her flatteries, except in private. She was a large, square-jawed woman with a high bosom, black hair, as yet only powdered with grey, and a moustache, which grew coarser as she increased in age. No more sincere or honourable creature lived; and she was shrewd and reasonable in most affairs of life, only losing her sense of proportion where her nephew happened to be concerned.

As for him, life as yet had never scratched him, and no man could say whether his adornments of diction and his amiable attitude to his fellow-creatures were veneer or intrinsic; whether his decorations—so pleasing in themselves—were of the surface, or ran through the piece of him. He stood an inch shorter than his aunt, was very square across the shoulders, and thrust out his chest like a soldier. He walked with a strutting stride, held his head back, and adopted an air of gentle complacency, the natural result of his steadfast opinions and unvarying good fortune. He had a heavy nose, large brown eyes under a wide forehead, and a large mouth which showed all his teeth when he spoke or ate. In repose they were also visible, as his lips did not quite meet. They were very large and white and faultless. They shone out at all times, and the rest of his face seemed but a setting for them. He wore a small, close-cut beard, but, to his annoyance, was growing bald rapidly. He had, however, of late started to employ paraffin upon his head and already detected favourable indications. Rebecca Pascoe was more hopeful than he in this matter. She had absolute belief in prayer, and so, indeed, had Mr. Pascoe; but he would not permit himself to pray that paraffin might restore his failing hair, though he knew that his aunt was

doing so, and felt no objection. It seemed a prayer that a good old aunt might pray, though hardly desirable that a man himself should approach his Maker on such a subject.

Charles and his aunt waited for a visitor, and discussed the purpose that was bringing her. He had no secrets from Miss Pascoe; indeed, he had none from anybody.

"It would be a very wonderful thing for Anstice, of course, to be married to you; and if you feel she's the right wife for you, then no doubt she is," declared Rebecca.

"I've felt it for some time," he answered. "But, in such a great matter, I also felt it was not a thing to hurry. I admire her person and respect her mind, because she's got a nice nature and you don't hear her say unkind things about anybody. I wouldn't say she's a strong character; but I've an idea that I could help her in that matter."

"Of course you could. The woman you marry is bound to lean on you. And it's right she should."

"Once I thought I might be a bit old for her; but that is not the case. I am young in heart and, if anything, she is a little old for her age. At least, so I find her."

"She always admired you and had a very nice feeling for you. When she was ten years old she pleased me very much, because she said she thought that God must be very like you. And that childish respect would no doubt turn into a very helpful fashion of mind in a wife."

Charles laughed.

"Poor child! At my age, of course, and with my life-time of self-control behind me, I shouldn't do anything wilful about her. I believe it would be a very good thing for me to win her and have her here to be your right hand; but there's more to it than that. I must be satisfied it would be a good thing for her too."

"Like your modesty to doubt it. Such an idea won't strike anybody else—least of all her parents. 'Tis only this complication about her poor cousin; and if you and her parents can't open her eyes in that matter——"

She broke off, for May Mortimer appeared at the gate and Charles hastened to open it for her. He and his aunt had been waiting in the garden until she should arrive.

Mrs. Mortimer displayed a shade of deference before the Pascoes.

" I knew you'd spare me a little of your valuable time," she said, and the man answered :

" What is time when the welfare of a woman hangs on it—not to say a man ? "

" It's like this : everything was going smooth enough, and we knew that you meant to win Anstice in your own good time. But you hadn't started on her—no blame to you—and she, being a humble creature, never thought that you were going to offer for her presently. In fact, none of us would have expected such a great thing, if you hadn't very kindly told my husband what was in your mind."

" It was the old, gentlemanly way—to approach the parents first—and I'm a great stickler for the old ways, Mrs. Mortimer."

" And right to be, and God knows I wish there was more with your opinions. But Anstice, never thinking of you, except as a friend and very condescending to her, took up with her cousin James, and fell in love with the man. Now that's out of all reason for a hundred reasons."

" I'm glad you think so—for the sake of Anstice."

They entered the house at this point of the conversation, and Charles took the visitor into a sitting-room of commodious size, under a low ceiling. It was crammed with furniture from the mid-Victorian time and smelt of beeswax. The suite of chairs, arm-chairs and sofas were upholstered in chocolate-coloured cloth and hung with antimacassars. Coloured prints adorned the walls, and, upon the polished walnut table in the midst, books were arranged fan-wise from a central decoration of coral and coraline under a glass shade. On a small side-table, beneath the window, also covered with an antimacassar to keep off the dust, reposed the Pascoe family Bible, and on the mantel-shelf were coloured glass vases, with two photographs representing the parents of Charles. His mother had been taken in life, during the days of the crinoline. She was like him, and showed her teeth in the same way. His father had always declined the camera, but after death the family desired that his features should be preserved, and his picture represented an old, shrunken head with closed eyes, lifted upon a pillow.

" Of course, a mother and father are called to think of

a great many things when a girl falls in love. And I may say that, in this matter, if you hadn't been in it at all, Mr. Charles, we should have still felt Anstice couldn't marry James Worth."

"If I may say so, they're too much alike," answered Rebecca Pascoe. "'Twould be a case of the blind leading the blind, and we all know where that lands both parties."

"That is so," declared Charles. "As a student of character in my way, I should think that they were both the sort that wanted a stronger will to be happy in the married state. And once we're agreed that they're mistaken, the next thing is to show them they are. Mind you, I wouldn't marry your daughter, Mrs. Mortimer, if I felt that it was coming between her and her happiness to do so. But I know very well, without vanity, that, as my wife, she would get a great deal her cousin couldn't give her. I don't mean worldly wealth, such as you see indicated in this room. I don't pride myself on anything of that sort, and these blessings only make me more active to help others who haven't got them. But I mean the intercourse of the mind and all that goes to it, if a young, inexperienced woman marries a man a good few years older than herself. Many, in their blindness, might think that was contrary to nature; but if a man isn't above nature in such a thing, I'd be sorry to be a man. We can't follow nature in a great many directions; for why? Because we've got immortal souls. In a word, I think, after a year of it—perhaps less—Anstice would be a very happy, contented woman with me, and go from strength to strength. My dear aunt is here, and she's got a heart of gold, and would be a second mother to her; while she'd always have you within two hundred land yards."

"A blessed state for any girl, surely," said the mother of Anstice, with a rapt expression.

"She'd appreciate the refinement, for she's naturally of a very refined disposition; and I think she would get to feel very soon, if not immediately, that her lot was one to be thankful for. I've no fear whatever that I shouldn't win her love in time, because she's already got admiration and respect for me; and these things will very soon ripen into love when she finds what I am in the privacy of my home—will they not, Aunt Rebecca?"

"They certainly will, if she's an ordinary, human girl, with her fair measure of intellects, as we know her to be," answered Miss Pascoe.

"Then I proceed," continued her nephew. "There shall be nothing devious, because I'm not a deviating sort of man. I've never had any temptation to deviate in the course of my life, and I should not have succumbed to it if I had. I think I may safely ask you to leave the rest to me. It is a delicate matter, but, convinced as I am that we are right and Anstice is wrong, I shall not shrink from my course of action, for all our sakes."

"How you like to think of us!" said Miss Pascoe.

"One cannot do less. I shall try to forget nobody. I must consider James Worth, too. He's a nice, gentle fellow, and may be quite reasonable, even though he is in love. Perfect love casteth out fear, and it ought to cast out selfishness, too. I shall make my appeal to James. I want this thing to be kept on a high plane if we can. I believe I've a little diplomatic power in me. In fact, I've proved it. We shall see. There are so many points of attack that one feels that poor, good James is really beaten before the battle begins. But I won't call it a battle. I've every confidence that I shall be able to show him what real, deep love means. At his age a man hardly knows this. In a word, both may live to bless me; and, if they don't, I shall still be conscious that they ought to."

"And if I may say it, Mr. Charles, don't delay over-long. They know we're opposed to it, as all sensible people must be; but the young fret under opposition, and it often drives them into violence. They'll lose their heads sometimes, and do things in a day that years can't mend."

"I understand, Mrs. Mortimer. I will not let the grass grow under my feet, I promise you. In these cases, if one must strike, the true kindness is to strike hard. To some men—especially men of goodwill, such as myself—this is difficult; but the difficulty vanishes if we know we are right. In this case we are. I feel that strongly. For the good of Anstice, and also for the good of James, they must have their eyes opened. I'll come to tea this very night, unless you have any reason to the contrary, and ask Anstice to return with me. I love her, remember—I really do. And, if you love a person well enough even to

hurt them for their good, you may have every reason to hope that, in time, they'll return it."

May fell in with his suggestion.

"We'll take tea a bit early," she said, "and then you can have a tell with her before James comes back from the shop."

"That will do very well; and it may be best, presently, to talk to them together. We shall see as to that."

"How many men would think of such kindness?" asked Rebecca.

"I'm sure not many," answered the visitor. "Every word you say makes me see what a proper partner you'd be for my girl; and I know now it will happen."

"And proud your family ought to be," declared Miss Pascoe.

"They will be—all of them, except David Mortimer. But you know him—he's outside the fold, and a person that none of his own flesh and blood even pretend to understand."

"Don't they? Fancy!" exclaimed Charles. "He's not in the least difficult, really. I understand him very well. However, he does not enter into the matter one way or another. I'll be round for a cup of tea at a quarter after four o'clock."

Mrs. Mortimer went her way, and at the appointed time Pascoe appeared, drank his tea, improved the occasion and chatted with Anstice, who was silent, abstracted and alarmed. For she had not known that he was coming, and hesitated when he asked her to return home with him.

"I have a book that I'm wishful for you to read," he told her; and since she could not well refuse to do so, she returned with him an hour later to Strane Steps.

Miss Pascoe saw them approaching, and Anstice found her waiting at the door. Charles left them together while he went to fetch the promised book, and Rebecca took the opportunity to say some things concerning him that he could not say for himself. It was a process familiar to the visitor, and had been going on for some weeks; but now the attack had become more sustained and direct.

"I like to see you here," said the aunt of Charles. "With some people you feel they fit into a house as if it had been built for 'em, and with others you do not.

Please God, you'll see the light presently and know what blessings He's waiting to pour out for you, my dear."

"Everybody's made of kindness, I'm sure."

"Kindness ain't no use if it's mixed with blindness, as often happens," answered the elder. "But I'm a woman who has lived with Charles for twenty years, and watched him grow up and show his character, so there's no fear of blindness for me. That man's a light on our darkness, and if an old, experienced party like me finds him so, for such a young thing as you he would be a dazzling flame."

"He would, for certain. He'd be too much for any young woman: she never could rise to him."

"No, Anstice, that's true enough; but Charles would come down to her. He's as reasonable as he's religious. He wouldn't ask impossibilities, and you'd be surprised to find how he can throw himself into the fun and frolic proper to young creatures. He's got a heart to feel for old and young alike, and he can rejoice with the happy and mourn with the sad. There's a wonderful instinct in him, as I've never seen in any other man, to suit his spirit to his company and just strike the proper note for every affair of human life. He knows what to do at a christening or a funeral, and everything that lies between them two events; and while some men and women shine by fits and starts, and come out well sometimes and fail at others, Charles is always the same, and never fails."

"I'm sure of that—and kindness made alive," confessed Anstice.

"Yes; and since he's showed himself to be equal for all sorts and conditions of men, as they say, and never at a loss, you may be sure that, as a married man, he would still keep it up and be just the same. And to have won the love of such a man is a very great thing for any young person to have done, and I respect you very much for doing it."

Charles, who was listening on the other side of the door, entered at this moment with a book in his hand, and Miss Pascoe left them together.

"I cannot give you the book, Anstice, because my father left it to me under his will, and it is an heirloom in our family," he began. "But I should like to think in time to come, when I'm called to my rest, that it would really

be yours in the course of nature, though, if you were ever blessed with a son, it would be his. It will take you a long time to read, for it is as long as the Bible itself; but you will find it deeply interesting if you start in an intelligent spirit, as I hope you will; and there are ancient illustrations in the text, and also most interesting maps of Palestine, which will repay study. Most of the names of places are changed nowadays; the Dead Sea is called the Sea of Asphaltum, and in one map it is suggested that the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah lie at the bottom of that sea. Which may, or may not, be the case. But, at any rate, you will find wonderful reading in it, and I hope you will read it out of friendship to me, and also to improve your mind, which is always a very good thing to do."

He placed upon the table a venerable and massive edition of Josephus; and Anstice felt a chill shiver before the close-printed pages as he opened it. Anything less likely to attract her could hardly have been imagined; Charles himself had never read much of it, and never would. It was a work ostentatiously produced after dinner on Sundays and opened at a marker—a sort of ritual, and no more.

Perhaps he had an idea that perusal of Josephus might age Anstice, and thus advance his cause. He felt more than ever conscious to-day of her youth, and while it attracted him, as her delicate beauty did, he suspected that here lay the danger. But if she could only be made to appreciate the solid and lasting advantages of the proposed match, his end must be attained, and she would come willingly, as he wished, rather than unwillingly, as seemed probable.

That she would come—would have to come—he knew, and his concern was not a fear of losing her, but a dislike of marrying her against her inclination. As a humane man, he deplored any such necessity and the cloud it must involve; but, fully conscious that the cloud, at worst, could not be of long duration, and must pass from Anstice under the sun of fuller knowledge and understanding of himself, he was prepared even for that passing pain.

He spoke now very reasonably on the subject of character.

"In this matter between me and James Worth," he said, "we must have no bitterness or tragedy, and nobody must say anything they'd be sorry for afterwards. We are all religious beings, with good credit in the world, and James, in his sphere, is quite as well thought of as I am myself. I hear, from Mr. Edwards and his daughter, Sophia, that James has very considerable ability and a pretty good head for figures. He is, in fact, quite a man to respect and take seriously, because you never know how good, or how bad, anybody really is. The good often hide their goodness for modesty, and the bad hide their badness because, if it was known, they would no longer be trusted. But you can't hide more than a certain amount from an eye like mine. And why I see more about people than some of us, is because I come to human nature in a spirit of honest inquiry, Anstice. I don't take a man at his own valuation, because that would be weak-minded with most men; and what's the result of that? Why, it cuts both ways, and I stand, as it were, at the seat of judgment, and the vain man I cast down and the humble man I exalt. God's way, in fact. You see what I'm coming to. I'm coming to James; and what is the result of my system with James? Why, I have actually a higher opinion of James than he has of himself!"

"You couldn't have a lower, Mr. Charles."

"You needn't call me 'Mister' any more. It was seemly and respectful while you were a child; now that you have, as it were, joined me on an adult plane—for a woman is always older than a man in some ways—now you can call me 'Charles'; and instead of the 'Mister,' I hope, in fullness of time, my dear Anstice, an adjective—indeed, many adjectives—may rise to your lips. But we were talking of James. Yes, James is too humble; he undervalues himself and stands in his own light."

"He'll never alter; he's only proud of one thing, and that is my love for him."

"And very right to be proud of it, and, as cousins sprung from the same ancestors, you ought to love each other. Blood is thicker than water. But what I'm coming to is this—indeed, you've just said it. James will not change. There is a rooted meekness in James, which is altogether right and proper in all of us when approaching the Throne

of Grace, Anstice; but is quite unnecessary, and in fact quite wrong, before our fellow-men. The very face of James always seems to be asking for somebody to hit it, if I may say so. Such a man cannot be expected to make his way in the world, still less his wife's way in the world. Therefore what, in all human kindness, should we wish for such a man?"

"To bide single, I suppose you mean?"

"Not at all. I am no advocate of the single life. We owe it to the community and—but that's another subject. No, I should wish to see James happily married, just as I should wish to see you happily married; and my knowledge of human nature is such that I can tell exactly the sort of wife he ought to choose. We agree that he can't go far single-handed, therefore it is to his wife we must look for his success. Now you are far too like him, Anstice—a beautiful nature—and, admiring and loving you, as I honestly do, I can't help admiring James, too, in his way, because he has some of your gifts. But while admirable gifts for the wife of a strong man, as I hope you'll live to know, they are mere perils in the wife of a weak man. And what follows?"

Anstice hated these continual questions. She pouted now and did not answer.

"You do not reply, but your heart replies, I am sure. It follows that if you really loved James you would not marry him. This, of course, lift's the whole argument on to the highest possible plane, Anstice; and I am very well pleased to leave it there for you to think about. Turn it over in an open spirit. Don't feel rebellious; nothing is gained by that. And remember that I only want your happiness and welfare—you know that, don't you?"

"Yes, I know that, Mr. Charles."

"Just plain 'Charles' to you. I'll get a piece of brown paper and some string and tie up the Josephus in it. Be careful only to read when your hands are clean. I've enjoyed this talk very much, my dear. We've cleared away some of the dust. I think girls have a wrong idea altogether about love and marriage. They get it from stupid stories. If the whole business is approached from another standpoint, we are nearer reality. Hysterical and sentimental considerations are not a proper foundation.

We must build on bed-rock that will stand the storms and tempests. Then we can defy them. I am speaking as a bachelor, of course, but, in every affair of life, common sense must be the foundation if we are to build lastingly; and no doubt this applies to marriage as well as other things."

"Love's love," murmured Anstice, thirsting for the outer air.

"And what is love? It is nothing to say that a thing is itself. I believe love—real love—is misrepresented and distorted, Anstice. We mistake other things for it till we reach a certain age. In fact, I would almost go so far as to say that young people are prevented from feeling the real thing. It might no doubt be proved that lasting love only comes with years of discretion."

"If one person's too young to feel it, another person might be too old," ventured Anstice. "Perhaps there's one sort of love proper to young people and another proper to old people, and another proper to middle-aged people."

"Perhaps so. It is a large subject, and always interesting if looked at intelligently. But one knows it when one feels it—that I can say from personal experience; and I love you very much indeed, Anstice; and I shall regard it as the grand object of my life to make you feel the same of me some day."

She coloured up and rose to go.

"It's so cold and calculating to talk as if it was settled, and what I want doesn't matter! It isn't nice. It makes me—good night, I'm going home now."

"Won't you wait till I have tied up the Josephus?"

"No," she said, the woman flashing in her. "It's too heavy for a girl to carry. You can leave it at my home if you want me to read it."

He stared and lifted his eyebrows a little. It was a new idea that he should leave a parcel.

"Good night then, and thank you for coming," he said, and saw her to the door. She went out hastily, with the air of a bird that has found its cage open. He gazed after her and reflected.

"To fetch and carry! I know some of them expect us to do that. Well, why not, after all? Love should be prepared to fetch and carry, of course."

Presently he spoke to his aunt.

"I advanced the position considerably and threw a good deal of light. I illuminated James—not with any unkind touch on his infirmities, but just in a proper spirit."

"She haven't took the book, however?"

"No; she said I could carry it over for her."

"My stars! Said you could carry it! I don't like that, Charlie."

"On the contrary, I do. It was what you might call a sex challenge, Aunt Rebecca. If she had taken it, that would have meant a consciousness of her subordinate position as compared with me."

"Well?"

"Yes; but not in the place of love. She challenges my manhood by refusing to take the book and telling me to bring it. Perhaps, though, that's too subtle for you?"

"If she's going to make you run messages, there's nobody I know as will get fed up sooner than you," said his aunt.

Charles showed all his teeth in a radiant expression of rather hard amusement.

"No, no—you have never felt the sex challenge, so cannot be expected to understand. Man must run woman's messages sometimes. They have a perfect right to make us carry their parcels when they can, seeing what much heavier parcels they are called by Providence to carry for us. We can afford to oblige them in the small things, well knowing that they will always have to oblige us in the big ones."

"And ought to be proud and thankful to," declared Aunt Rebecca.

CHAPTER X

AT THE ' PLUME OF FEATHERS '

Barry Worth was bringing in a load of peat from Nun's Cross to Princetown, but climbing the hill from Tor Royal his horse dropped half a worn-out shoe. He left cart and horse, therefore, at the forge, and while Benjamin Halfyard fitted a new shoe, proceeded to the ' Plume of Feathers.' But first he cautioned Ben.

" Keep that bit of iron still hanging to his hoof. I picked up t'other half on the road when we lost it. If I didn't take 'em back, old man would have a fit."

" An eye like an 'awk for a cast shoe," said Halfyard. " He picks shillings off the road every year, that man."

" He does. The way he turns nought into money, you'd never believe. He teaches you to keep your eyes open. There's a sporting side to being a miser, Ben. He hunts money like you and me would hunt a rat in a rick."

" And about so much good to him, when got, as the rat to us, I reckon."

" It's according to the point of view. His fun is to have the stuff behind him, because cash is power. If I was rich —well, I'd use the power more than my uncle."

" I'd turn the money into what's better than money, myself," declared Ben. " If I was rich, I'd make my money work for me. I wouldn't work a stroke more myself. 'Tis what money can buy matters."

" Then you'd feel the money oozing away and gettin' less, while you played about. That mightn't hurt you ; but to some folk the pleasure got by spending would be a lot less than the pain got by parting."

" Your money's your master, else 'tis your servant," answered Ben, as he beat a piece of red-hot iron and the sparks flew. " You can't have it both ways. And if I could make the experiment, I know which my money would be to me."

" Few can make the experiment," answered young

Worth. "For my part, I'd take a half-way course, I reckon, and respect the stuff too much to waste it, and yet not let it bide doing nothing."

He departed, and in ten minutes resumed the same subject with Marian Dennis. They had long composed their difference, and now, since the bar was empty, he kissed her and was kissed again.

She felt surprise to see him in working hours, until he explained the accident that left him at leisure for a little while.

"And how are you getting on?" she asked. "A good few say you'll never endure your uncle—such a free and easy chap as you. And still more say he'll never endure you."

"And what do you tell 'em?"

"I listen. I'm not supposed to know anything in particular about you. Only Damaris understands. She's found it out, I fancy."

"If she has, we can trust her to keep shut about it. She'll never squeak. I'm getting on all right. I hate Nun's Cross, but I hate it less than I did. There's an interesting side to it. The worst is the beastly food. He eats like a badger—anything that can be ate. 'What don't fill fattens, and what don't fatten fills.' That's a very favourite speech of his. He uses that saying same as respectable people say 'grace' afore dinner."

"You're looking all right."

"I am all right. He knows you can't get hard work without red meat, so he keeps us fed to working pitch, like the hosses. But he says there's some men can't carry meat, same as some hosses can't carry corn. Uncle always kept Little Jack short, much to his grief, because he thought he got lazy on beef and mutton. He's an old terror, for certain; but he amuses me."

"How can you submit—you with your temper and feeling for justice?"

Barry considered.

"It's a game," he said. "Of course he angers me sometimes, because he's narrow as a knife and defeats his own object, owing to being so mean. It often happens that if he'd spend a trifle he'd get back more than he puts out. There's another side to him, though. I may pretend to see life with his eyes, but I often do really see

it with his eyes. He learns you a lot, and as for justice, I wouldn't call him unjust. He hates a good many things; but he hates the right things. At least, I often find I hate the same."

"So, of course, they must be right, you vain chap! But I won't have you say that, neither," she answered, "because he hates women, and you can't say that's justice, surely."

"No, he's all wrong about women, I grant. I suppose some woman got her claws into him, and he's never forgiven the race; though my mother says he was always like that, and she don't remember he ever had any truck with them."

Barry drank half a pint of beer and they argued about the virtues and failings of David Mortimer. Then they planned a meeting for the following Sunday, and Marian asked concerning James.

"I see him looking out of the shop door over the way now and again, and we give each other good-day sometimes; but he never comes in now, like he used to do, and he looks a good bit down. What's going to be the end of it? 'Twill be a cruel shame if they take her away from him."

"You'll hear something in that quarter before long," he promised. "I can trust you with secrets, and the secret is, that some fine day Jimmy and Anstice will disappear like a puff of smoke, and afore everybody's done wondering about it, they'll come back man and wife."

She was delighted.

"My! That's more like you than your brother."

"It is me," said Barry. "In his despair the poor beggar came to me to lend a hand, and hating 'Gentleman' Pascoe a good bit, as I always have, for no reason in particular, I lent a hand. I'll tell you about the details on Sunday."

"That will be an ugly shock for Mr. Pascoe then, because he reckons that he's as good as got her. I heard him in the bar three evenings ago. I wasn't listening, but you can't help hearing him, because, when he talks, the rest generally stop to listen. And he told Mr. Edwards that he hoped that there would soon be a matter on which the people would congratulate him."

"Edwards won't, anyway. Why, we all know that Sophia Edwards is properly sick for Pascoe. Even Jimmy—blind though he is—sees that; and as a matter of fact—secrets again—Sophia is on Jimmy's side, for she believes, if Anstice was out of the way, that Charles Pascoe would turn his attention to her."

"I can understand some women liking him—for the security."

"I can't—I can't understand a dog liking him. But why? Even my old man hates him, because he says he's a sham and his face is a mask."

"I don't think it is. I believe he's a very good man according to his lights."

"But he's good in such a beastly fashion. He's so damned good that you feel you'd like to strangle him. It's the sort of goodness that makes a decent person properly itch to be wicked."

"Some women might flourish along with him—Sophia Edwards might; but not Anstice—never. She'd wilt along with him like a davered * rose, poor little thing, and hang her lovely head."

"Well, you needn't waste your sighs on her, my pretty. It ain't goin' to happen. Charlie will have the surprise of his life. They've both listened to me—James and Anstice—though it took a bit of talk, so simple they be. But I've screwed 'em up to the fighting pitch. 'If you're out to best Pascoe,' I told James, 'you must act. Words ain't no good.' So they've got to lie low and make everybody think they're going to give in, and then do something that all the words in the dictionary can't undo."

Marian regarded Barry with pride and affection.

"What a clever chap you are! I don't know however you could look at a simple girl like me."

"You're not simple. You know a thing or two, and you was clever enough to see I'm clever. That meant a lot to a man like me. And when the time comes, we'll show other people we're clever, too. We can just go our way for the present and keep our eyes on the main chance."

She nodded and felt a secret hope that he would not let what he called 'the main chance' modify his views and ambitions. She would rather have heard him express

* *Davered* = faded.

detestation of his uncle's life and ideals than the moderate condemnation he had uttered. But it was impossible that Barry would ever be dominated by the base ambition to hoard. Did he not fetch a crown from his pocket before he left the bar, as well as the pence for his beer, and tell Marian to put the money in her money-box ?

" I always like they ' cart-wheels,' " he said, spinning the great silver coin on the counter. " There's something solid to 'em. There's power to 'em ; and I like St. George killing the dragon on 'em, too.'

She always took what money he brought her and saved every farthing. The total amount was not far short of twenty pounds, and when it reached that sum, she intended to tell him and astonish him.

" What's mine is yours," she always said, " so I take all you give, and you know where it is."

As a rule Barry protested when she told him so, and begged her to spend his gifts upon herself. To-day he did not.

" A very wise plan," was his comment on this occasion. Then a customer came into the bar, and whispering the words, " Sunday—Black Tor," the young man returned to his horse and cart.

There was a sharp smell of burnt horn in the forge.

" My old boy will be mad when he hears of this," he said. " You'll get the blame for certain, Ben, because he knows to an hour when last this hoss was shod, and he'll be sure to say you use poor iron for it to wear so quick."

" He'll talk like that without a doubt," admitted Benjamin. " But I don't know as anybody will much mind, or be the worse. There's t'other half of the old shoe."

CHAPTER XI

AMONG THE RUSHES

David Mortimer, on his old piebald horse, came up through the great plain of Fox Tor Mire behind a hundred sheep. Like a galaxy of stars the new-shorn creatures twinkled upon the green waste, and when they became too scattered a sheep dog flashed out—long and lean—to bring them together again. The farmer was driving his flock to another 'stroll,' south of Nun's Cross, and presently, as he ascended the hill within sight of his own house, he came upon Barry Worth cutting rushes.

"Us'll have another nich yet of they rexens," he said; "but leave the big clump by the moss-bed down under. They be extra fine, and I keep 'em for candles."

The day was hot, and the air danced over the great heath in a tremor of colourless light.

"Drouthy weather, uncle," said the young man.

"Didn't I say 'twas coming? Never see such a lot of cotton grass as this year. 'Tis always the sign of a hot summer, or I know nought. And it vexes me above a bit to see it go to waste, for I'm darned sure there's money in cotton grass if an understanding man was to take it in hand. In the old days my mother and father used to tell how, as little ones, they went wool-gathering and fetched every whisk of it as they could find; and 'twas sent to the spinners and made into good worsted stockings and such like; but none ever looked after all this cotton, though, no doubt, it could be put to use."

Barry laughed.

"There ban't a thing on Dartymoor you wouldn't put to use, I reckon. You use the weather and the moor as nobody else does."

"More praise to me for the only thinking man up here. Humans could live on the place if it wasn't for the damned Duchy, as picks the eyes out of it and denies us our

lawful food, and goes behind the laws entered into with moor-men from time beyond count."

"Venville rights gived us all—all that could do us good—didn't they?" asked David's nephew, who knew it was a favourite theme. According to his own wits, he was taking the measure of his uncle and learning how to please him. He had, indeed, found that the old man might be made less terrible with tact, and he also discovered that David Mortimer's sentiments possessed for him some measure of attraction. The harsh sayings that chilled elder people, or angered them, came to Barry as information. David's attitude to life did not, in his opinion, clash with justice. Such ideas were very interesting; he often found himself in agreement with them; he did not always flatter his uncle, but often genuinely praised him.

"Venville gave us all but vert and venison," declared Mortimer, glaring at an imaginary foe. "And vert is green wood, of which there's none nowadays; and venison be venison. And the deer went when the forests went, because they couldn't harbour without 'em. But there's the moor left, and nobody tames it like I do—nobody makes it bend to 'em like I do. The feeble people fear the moor, and so it treats 'em like a beast treats us if it knows we're feared of it; but I've mastered it. Food, fodder, fuel, stone, gravel—all are here; and when fools cuss granite, I laugh at 'em, because granite's so good-natured as putty if you know how to handle it."

"Must have a bit of granite in yourself to do it, however."

"And who that's worth a cuss haven't?"

"And there's tin under the granite, too—good money there, I suppose."

"As for tin," said David, shaking his head, "I put no trust in mines, and never a penny of mine went into 'em or ever will. The mines make money for them that start 'em, because far-away folk are always ready to speculate. They read the prospectuses and hope to get something for nothing, and see their hundreds turn into thousands without working for 'em—a hope that never dies in some sort of fools. But I know a better way for money than to hand it over to rogues as don't care a damn more for me than I do for them. Let 'em come by all means, and let

'em pay wages, and drop a bit into our local men's pockets; but when you've heard as any stuff of mine have gone into a tin mine, or any other, then lock me up—'twill be time."

Barry laughed.

"Duchy gets its bit out of 'em, no doubt," he said.

"Duchy gets its bit out of everybody; and if it had a soul to lose, or a backside to kick, I'd be the firstest to let fly. Duchy have stole our rights from us and took our lawful food out of our mouths."

"The game laws."

"To hell with the game laws! And when the people rise, 'twill be the game laws they'll tread under foot first. Did the Almighty put salmon and trouts in the river for Duchy to tax 'em, and game birds and beasts 'pon the moor for Duchy to make money out of 'em and forbid 'em to me? These things were before the Duchy, and they'll outlast the Duchy. They be ours; and to take them from us be so much robbery as to take Nun's Cross from me and make me pay rent for what my race has won with the sweat of their brows and the work of their hands."

"The Prince will see to it some day."

"Not him! He ain't got time. 'Tis us will see to it some day, when sense grows in us and we learn the art to join together, like other men, and put up a bold front against Duchy."

"You'll have to tell 'em at the next rent audit, uncle."

"They won't hear me at the audits," said David. "They shout me down, the cowardly dogs; because at the audits the Duchy feasts us, and they say you can't talk straight to Duchy while you're eating its food and drinking its liquor. But where does the food and liquor come from—out of Duchy's pocket, or mine?"

Suddenly he stopped and turned on Barry.

"But what's all this to you, you lazy dog? You're just drawing me on and making me talk, so as you should rest from the rexens. You go on with your work! You're just as bad as the rest—lazy—lazy—anything for a quiet life. And if ever you was a responsible creature with a stake in the land, which you never will be, I lay you'd herd with the rest and go on groaning under Duchy, like they sheep groan under the sun."

"There'll be maggots in the sheep if we don't look out," said Barry.

"Yes—like there's maggots in our own sheep's heads," answered the old man; "but there's never no maggots in my sheep."

"Nor in your head neither—I'll swear to that."

"If there ain't, I'm the only one of the race that lack 'em," answered David. "We Mortimers are a slack-twisted lot, and I've yet to find you better than your mother or your brother."

"Mother's put about for Jimmy. Of course, being a matter of marriage, she can't expect no sympathy from you with your opinions."

"No, she can't. And if I thought you felt any, I'd soon show you."

"You needn't fear me. I've got no use for the girls."

"Fegs! The blindness of it! The generations go on, and every new one be like the last—ready to be kindidled by anything in a petticoat. Men don't grow no wiser afore 'em. They catch us young, and we come to our years of wisdom ruined. If there was a law against men marrying afore they was forty—what a different world! But the hookem-snivey job goes on—all built on a trick of nature; and the women know where the men are weak, and trade on it, and despise 'em for it. Remember that! They despise where they don't fear. They think we're a lower order of creation than them; and them that love us despise us just as much as them that lie to us."

"They can't despise you more than you despise them, seemingly," said Barry.

"You get on with your work and keep the women out of your head," answered the old man.

He called his dog, who was lolling in the heather with her tongue out, and soon the flock and its master had vanished over the hill, while Barry, smiling to himself, lit his pipe and mowed at the rushes.

He seldom thought twice about his uncle's sentiments, save on the subject of money; but when David deigned to speak of that, he always interested his nephew. From a sublime indifference to the matter, Barry began to see the immense significance of cash. Once or twice already he had indicated to Mr. Mortimer how pence might be

saved in certain directions. This he had done after a week at Nun's Cross, and he did it as a joke; but, to his surprise, David took the suggestions seriously, put them into practice, and found Barry was right.

Sometimes the elder discussed saving in all its bearings and maintained that the State was much to blame, in that it did not compel saving. He declared that the poorest buy many things that they could go without. Mr. Mortimer resented taxation with all his might. This, indeed, was an unsleeping grievance. He was bellicose, and even suggested sometimes that he would sacrifice money if, by so doing, he could defeat the authorities. But Barry doubted the truth of this assertion. It appeared incredible to him that for the purely negative satisfaction of 'besting' his fellow-man, the master of Nun's Cross would lose a penny.

"If he ever sacrificed twopence for the luxury of scoring off the Government, he ain't a true miser," argued Barry with himself.

To-day, however, his thoughts soon deserted the old man, for a great matter occupied him—an intrigue, entered into with zest and delight, though its purpose had only to do with the welfare of others. The situation with James and Anstice had quickly become so pressing that it was clear immediate steps must be taken to save their romance. It seemed, indeed, as though Anstice began to yield before the tremendous pressure at home and the steady determination of her elderly lover. James, too, had seen Mr. Pascoe and been hopelessly defeated in conversation. Thus poison had been dropped into both their cups, and those arguments advanced most likely to cloud their simple faith in each other. But for Barry the pair might actually have fallen apart. There remained, however, their love, and if that now seemed a guilty thing in the opinion of their elders, it continued strong enough to incline them to the brother of James. They listened to him eagerly, thankfully; they strove to believe his assurance that they were right and everybody else exceedingly wrong.

"Get on with it," advised Barry. "Time enough to talk afterwards. Then talk won't hurt you. Now it does; and if she gives ear to her mother and you listen

to Charles much longer, you'll begin to agree with 'em and wreck yourselves for their pleasure."

They obeyed him, though timorously. They proceeded to their adventure, but doubt was in them and they did not go forward wholeheartedly. It was not the contemplated action they distrusted, but something far more important. It seemed impossible that such a man as Pascoe and such a woman as the mother of Anstice could be entirely mistaken. A grain of fear had crept into their feeble souls, and their perfect love was not powerful enough to cast it out entirely.

CHAPTER XII

LITTLE JACK'S EXPERIMENT

By a direct exchange the affairs of Barry Worth and Little Jack had been completed, for when the latter left Nun's Cross he transferred his labours to Frog End, where the farmer who had employed Barry found Little Jack a great improvement upon him. Nor was David Mortimer disappointed, for under him his nephew adopted more strenuous methods than of old, faced the new life in a spirit of future calculation, and brought an intellect to his uncle's work which Little Jack could never bring.

The latter, however, gained every way by his change. Farmer White was a normal man, and expected normal men about him. He demanded nothing that Jack Bascombe, the younger, proved not equal to give; while in addition to a master he could satisfy, the new-comer found himself within easy distance of his sweetheart at White Works. For the boundaries of Frog End met those of Strane Steps, and beneath the high ground whereon Little Jack now often pursued his business, the roof that covered Sarah Mortimer and her little maid, Jane Bond, was actually in sight. Nor did Farmer White entertain the smallest objection to young men wedding young women, when they could afford to undertake that responsiblility.

A Sunday came when Jane stood at the door of Miss Mortimer's dwelling and waited for Little Jack. They were going for a walk, and Jane wore her best—a pale blue costume with pink trimmings, and a pink straw hat above her lint white curls. Sarah held a high opinion of Jane, and the young woman was familiar with the family affairs of her mistress. Thus they spoke together at the outer door while already the elongated figure of Jane's lover loomed like a telegraph post on the top of the northern hill.

Jane, secure in her happiness, mourned for Anstice, whom she knew and much admired.

" 'Tis a cruel come-along-of-it, miss," she said, " for how can a girl marry a man, even such a wonder as Mr. Pascoe, if she don't love him ? "

" They've often got to do it where they haven't strength to resist, Jane. 'Tis one of those things we mourn, yet know not whether we've a right to mourn. When somebody's doing what they believe to be their duty, you generally find somebody else is smarting and suffering. Ess, fay, I've seen it oft. So sure as the word ' duty ' come up, you'll find some human creature having a bad time—either them that be doing their duty, or else them that have to endure the results. In this case, I believe my brother Nathan's suffering a bit for his girl, because he's inclined to be tender by nature. But, of course, Anstice suffers most. And yet I'm not going to say her mother's wrong—not for a moment."

" Why not, miss ? Surely to drive a girl to marry where she don't love and take her away from where she do —— ? "

" There's a good deal more to it than that, my dear. A mother have got to look ahead for a child. Mrs. Mortimer is a clever woman, and may be doing what looks cruel in the present with an eye to what's kind in the future. Anstice is the sort—but there, I'm sick of saying that. You want to be very strong-minded and foresighted to torture a young creature for the sake of her future."

Sarah sighed.

" Thank God, it ain't like that with me," said Jane, regarding the approaching man. " If Mr. James had such a character as my Jack, I don't think he'd suffer it, miss. And I'm sure the temptation to throw me over was awful ; but he didn't budge ; and look how he's rewarded ! And I hope Mr. James won't budge either."

" From all accounts he is budging," said Miss Mortimer. " And if he's the sort that can be budged, then no doubt 'tis better for both their sakes he should be. 'Tis a law of nature, Jane, though cruel, that the strong get their way in love, and though the defeated suffer a lot for having to go without, you can't say that it may not be better in the long run for the next generation. Because 'tis a quality of love that the thing which love be invented for—he next generation—be the very last that enters the min

of the loving pair. So you may say that the love of the fathers be visited on the children quite as often as their sins; and that no doubt is why the clergymen say that love be a sinful thing unless the Church allows it."

"If 'tis sinful, us can't help it," answered Jane. "If nature makes you love a man, 'tis no good the clergymen telling you you're wicked. I can't no more help loving Jack than I can help going to sleep when I go to bed."

"Life's full of puzzles, and they often leave us in a very doubtful, not to say un-Christian frame of mind," declared Sarah. "But if you find a subject making you feel doubtfully Christian, the best way is to drop it like a red hot coal and think of something else." Then she greeted Little Jack, who strode up and touched his hat.

The lovers departed and Jane, still concerned for the niece of her mistress, put the problem to Little Jack. But he could throw no light upon it. They proceeded over the high moor, and the man exhibited to Jane an attitude rather callous and indifferent to the sufferings of the less fortunate pair. He was somewhat silent and, had Jane been able to penetrate the fastness of his little mind, she must have been astonished. Indeed, he did astonish her presently, and that in a very painful manner.

Little Jack never forgot anything. His intellect proceeded exceedingly slowly, and the crude mechanism which controlled his thought was such as might be likened to that of an elementary machine. An idea once received remained, and he was now solemnly considering another man's jest, uttered in his hearing some months before and long since forgotten by him who made it. But Little Jack had not forgotten, and when Barry assured him that a lover's quarrel was always worth the pains, for the sake of the immense joy of reconciliation, this uninspired youth had laid up the precept. In his fashion, like his betters, he felt avid of joy, and argued that if such an experience as Barry had indicated was an added delight to courting, he might as well taste of it. He thought of Jane, too, and solemnly decided that she must doubtless win as much pleasure from passing pain as he was destined to do. Common sense was not Little Jack's strong point, nor did he appreciate that while some delightful accidents may happen, to bring them about by deliberate and pre-

conceived effort is to create a situation the reverse of delightful.

His distraction to-day was solely caused by a determination to fall out with Jane, that the joyful business of making it up again might add delights to their afternoon out; and presently she gave him the desired opportunity.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked. "Your thoughts ban't on me or my questions. Where's your wits, Jack?"

"You mustn't speak to me like that," he said, secretly delighting in her surprise. "I won't be spoke to in that tone of voice, Jane."

She was silent before this rebuff, but he saw the colour come into her cheeks. For some while neither spoke: then the girl, with great self-control, asked him to find her a piece of white heather.

"It grows hereabouts," she said, "and 'twill bring me good luck, I dare say."

"Don't be such a gawk!" he answered. "Us know very well that a weed don't bring good luck. I hope you've got more sense than that, I'm sure."

Jane began to feel bewildered. Here was an experience beyond any in her love-making, or, indeed, in her brief existence. She marvelled that he could speak so, and for the moment astonishment held back anger.

"I can't please 'e, to-day, seemingly. I'd never have thought as you'd have spoke so short to me, Jack. Ban't you feeling well, or what is it? If I've done anything to vex 'e, tell me what 'tis, there's a good chap."

With difficulty he restrained himself from kissing her, but blundered on.

"Don't tell that rummage to me! I believe you want to make me angry, and if that's what you want, Jane Bond, you damn soon shall. I ain't made of patience, and the woman I marry must know that. And I won't marry you at all if you ban't more careful of your speech, so now, then!"

She stood still and stared at him. The heath swam round her. He had stuck out his jaw and assumed an expression of grotesque ferocity entirely foreign to his features. She thought he was going mad. Fear took the place of surprise.

"My God!" she said, "what is it—what is it, Jack? Tell me what 'twas I spoke that have made you so savage? I wouldn't have done it for nothing on earth!"

"How can I tell what you spoke? I can't call home all the silly things you say, can I?"

"You told me last week I'd got more sense in my little finger than you had in your whole head."

"You're a liar! I never said no such thing, and I won't marry a liar for love or money—not me. For two pins I'd slap your face, I would, you saucy baggage!"

Now Little Jack achieved his purpose, and this last insult banished Jane's passing fear and awakened very righteous wrath.

"You're drunky," she said. "That's the only excuse for you—drunk o' Sunday afternoon, here, in full daylight! And if I'd thought you'd ever disgrace yourself like that—— 'Tis you are the liar, not me—you, who told me you'd never been so much as bosky-eyed in your life, and kindidled me with your soft talk. And now you've done it, and you can go—a beastly creature that no woman would have any use for once she knew the truth of him!"

She turned away with shaking footsteps and heaving bosom. She tried to hide the tears leaping to her eyes, and felt her legs shake under her at this horrible experience.

Then Little Jack felt his object was achieved. Here, indeed, began a quarrel of majestic magnitude. She was angry now, and seriously angry. Nothing remained but the delightful reconciliation—to heal her wounds, dry her tears, and end all in a torrent of laughter.

Indeed, he began to laugh before he spoke, and roared lustily while Jane staggered away like a wounded bird. He let her go a dozen yards, with his shrill, equine explosion of merriment in her ears, then leapt to her side and put his arm round her.

"Poor gal—did he rub it in and make her feel silly? Did he make her think her Jack was drunky? And why? Why for, d'you reckon? All for a bit of fun, Jane—just so as us should kiss and hug and be friends again, and feel what a fine thing 'tis to make up a quarrel! He was right—the chap as told me! He said there was nought better in nature than for a man and woman to come

together again after a hell of a row; and more there be. Sit down upon this hillock, and I'll tell 'e all about it!"

She pushed his arms away and refused his kisses. She stared at him, red as a rose, and the tears dried out of her eyes quickly enough, for now they flashed little lightnings at the jovial creature grinning in her face.

"D'you mean as you made this up, and frighted me out of my life and very near broke my heart, for fun?" she gasped.

"Of course 'twas fun—what else should it be? Ban't you my future wife, and do 'e think I'd have a real quarrel for anything on God's earth?"

"No," she answered, in a voice trembling with passion, "I ain't your future wife now, and never will be, Jack Bascombe. Out of my sight, you God-forgotten fool!"

It was his turn to stare.

"'Tis a proper lovers' quarrel, sure enough," he said. "Just to think as any joke of mine could work you up to such a flare as that! But we've gone far enough, seemingly. Us had better drop it, Jane. It be working out wrong. I'm fed up with this."

"'Fed up'!" she cried. "And what should I be? Ban't life hard enough but you should make it harder, and egg me on and on—just to see me in a rage, and then laugh at me? You cold-blooded devil, if you're that sort, Lord help any woman as be weak enough to look twice at you. And no more ever will I. You've done for yourself now. Anyway, I've done with you, and you can be gone so soon as you mind to."

"I was wrong," he said. "I see that very plain indeed. This ban't a lovers' quarrel exacally. I'm sorry, Jane. I meant well."

"Go, then," she said, "and take your good meaning and your sorrow home another way. And you needn't be sorry for me, for I've escaped marrying a creature as will be the laughing-stock of the nation presently."

"Don't be so owdacious, woman! Can't you see there's no malice to it? Sit here in the green side, along with me, and calm down, and I'll explain my meaning."

"If you don't go," she said, "I'll talk to policeman to-morrow, and tell him to keep you away from me! I've done with you. I hate the sight of you."

"Oh, my gude God! Can you go so far as that, Jane?"

He stared at her, quite dazed and mystified. He mopped his forehead with a red and yellow handkerchief, while she turned and walked away as fast as she could.

"If there's anything as I can do to make it up, you've only got to name it," he shouted mournfully; but she did not answer, and continued to retreat as swiftly as possible.

So they parted, and, when he was out of sight, Jane Bond sank breathless in the heather and wept bitterly that she could ever have loved an idiot; while Little Jack sank upon a stone and meditated over the mysteries of human life and the relationship of the sexes, until setting sunlight burned red upon his uncovered brow.

He arrived, after two hours of reflection, at a simple, but sound, philosophic precept. He concluded that, if it takes two to make a quarrel, it also takes two to make it up again. Looking back, he perceived that it had required considerable energy and determination to make Jane quarrel. And if that were difficult, there seemed every reason to fear that reconciliation would prove still more so. It appeared exceedingly far away at present; "for a female as can call you 'a God-forgotten fool,' and rejoice that she has escaped from you, be going to take a powerful lot of getting round," mused Little Jack.

He lighted his pipe presently, and hit on a hopeful idea.

"'Twas Mister Barry as led me to this doom," he said to himself; "then I'll tell him the fatal thing he's done and ax him the next step, or if 'tis all over and I be a lost man."

CHAPTER XIII

THE STROKE FOR FREEDOM

James was about to take his annual holiday, and, to the surprise of all at White Works, he declared for an original excursion and a new departure.

His mother was gratified when he announced his intention to go to Plymouth for a few days.

"'Tis a very happy thought for you to see a bit of life," she said. Yet his intention puzzled her for more reasons than one. To begin with, James had begged a fortnight's holiday, and, though Mr. Edwards explained to him that his request was unusual and such leave must not be taken as a precedent, he none the less granted it.

James, too, had changed somewhat in the matter of Anstice. He railed less at his circumstances, and grew more calm and composed. Apparently he was beginning to see the right and reason for objections to his desires, and though both Damaris and her mother failed to guess what began to influence him, since against all arguments he still protested heartily, yet the fact remained that he became a more contented man and emerged gradually from the cloud of his disappointment.

He spoke less and less of Anstice, and, while his sister was indignant that he should allow himself to be influenced, his mother, though sorry enough for him, felt glad, and hoped that he would outlive his grief and return to the placid, colourless trend of his former days. Already she had her eye on a wife for James, the daughter of a widow at Princetown; but the time was not ripe to take any step in that direction.

She compared notes with May Mortimer, and heard things in that quarter which confirmed the suspicion that her son's engagement would soon be at an end. For Anstice, too, while not happy, appeared to be more resigned.

"I've not put any orders on her," explained May;

" too wise for that. We're just as usual, and she comes and goes and sees James when she pleases; but we're working, day and night you may say, and the signs aren't wanting that the thing is pretty well over. She inclines to our opinion, I believe. She's not a sly girl, or else you might think 'twas guile in her. But she goes her way, and ain't so downcast as she was; and now and again she'll open that book as Charles lent her and read a bit—no doubt because he wished it. For it ain't a book as anybody would read for pleasure. She sees Charles, too, now and again; and when I find a message to take to Miss Rebecca at Strane Steps, which I often do, she goes without making any fuss about it."

This was true enough. Anstice had fallen into the way of going not seldom to the home of Mr. Pascoe, where she always received a pleasant welcome from Rebecca, and occasionally met Charles himself. His aunt expatiated upon him, and sometimes allowed Anstice a mental glimpse, not only of her nephew's moral altitude and varied virtues, but also of his satisfactory worldly position. Indeed, Rebecca Pascoe worked very hard, and believed that she succeeded, while the man himself preserved a patient attitude, made love with decorum, and increased his attentions as he perceived improved opportunities to do so.

There seemed no doubt that Anstice began to yield under such benevolent pressure, and when Charles, in private, declared occasionally that the business of love-making began a little to irk him, his aunt prayed him to continue.

" Sometimes," he confessed, " I feel doubts if a man in my position ought to do it. I've always had a very sharp feeling of self-respect, and never done anything to lessen that feeling to my knowledge; but it comes over me now and again that I'm rather slighting myself to go so humble before the young woman, desirable though she may be."

" And quite natural, too. And I uphold you and admire you for it," Rebecca answered. " 'Tis certain that you are marvellously patient and long-suffering—you, a man that's only got to drop the handkerchief in Princetown to see a dozen of the best run for it. Why, Sophia Edwards, as will be made of money—— However

love is love, and I can tell you for your comfort that you'll have a very fine character in Anstice."

"If I didn't feel that, I shouldn't take this rather undignified line," he said. "But we all know that courting calls for a certain forgetfulness of self, and if the victory is mine, I shall remind Anstice of the facts afterwards."

"She knows them already. They're not flung away on her. She's said to me more than once that you're a wonderful man, and she can't think however you can look at her, when there's so many better about would be proud to take you."

"So long as she understands that——"

"She do. She feels your dignity. In fact, 'tis a very tempting item in a woman's mind always; and they like dignity in a man, because the wife be the moon to the husband's sun all times; and the more he shines, the better shines she."

So things stood, and the very absence of apparent guile in James and Anstice helped to increase the impression that there could be no guile in them. But one, who was not so innocent as they, stood first in their secret counsels. Though incapable of much resolution themselves, they had listened to another, and the moment for action now struck.

It was not for nothing that Mary Worth mildly wondered why James had developed originality and gone to spend his holiday at Plymouth; and it was not for nothing that May Mortimer, still more suspicious of the event, had conferred upon it in secret with her husband and Charles Pascoe, and determined to keep an exceedingly close watch upon Anstice until the young man should be back again.

May, indeed, always smelled a plot, yet nothing happened to confirm her fears until two days before the date when James was due to return home.

There came a night when Barry prepared to retire as early as his uncle, for on the morrow he was to drive calves to Buckland-of-the-Monks and proposed to start with dawn.

Chance willed that David discussed a matter uppermost in his nephew's mind, for Mr. Mortimer had visited White Works during the day—to get something for nothing from

his brother—and heard that the engagement of James and Anstice was practically at an end.

"Poor stuff be James," said David. "God, He knows I've little respect for such as would marry a wife, but fegs! to be choked off your will by a lot of stuffy people like my family! It was bound to be, however, for they are both cast in the same pattern."

"You'd have thought better of James if he'd put up a fight, uncle?" asked Barry.

"I should. I hate to see the race going down. I hate to think my father should have had such a grandson as James. But so life works in wild nature, and among humans also. The weakest go to the wall; and 'tis a very good thing they should. Your brother could only have bred poor stuff, so he's hustled out of breeding at all, because his sort can't fight for what it wants. 'Tis a good thing that it should be needful for men to battle for the women, in my opinion—I'd always make 'em have to fight with their fists before they should get a female, like the male creatures have to fight with horns or beaks, or teeth or claws. The toughest win—rightly."

"That's up against your own rule, that money's the greatest power, however," argued Barry. "Lots of human trash, rotten to the bone, can buy fine, healthy wives and make their money do what their bodies could not."

"Which shows, if it wanted showing, that women are a pack of fools from highest to lowest," answered David. "I'm not for putting money to work where we ought to put flesh and blood. Gold can't get healthy children; and if the daft women knew that, they wouldn't sell their bodies to foul, rich men. But women know nothing. In our class we're nearer to nature than the upper people, and as a rule, if two labouring men want a woman, the strongest wins her. And so Pascoe wins Anstice, and being, as he is, a very hateful creature, ignorant and smug and beastly every way—I hope he'll find he's drawn a blank."

"Charles don't like you any better than you like him. He told my mother that you'd charge the swallows for house-room under your eaves if you could."

"So I would," answered David; "and so would any man. There's a lot of things we would do if we could.

But nature's a rogue and a thief, and takes without asking and without payment."

"All the same, swallows bring good luck—and you can't deny you've had your share, Uncle David."

"Who knows what his share is? We only know that none gets it. You may have more than you deserve, or you may have less; but since there's no fairness nor justice in man, or nature, then you may be sure you've not got your deserts. 'Tis all preying in nature; everything bites something else, from the louse to the tiger; and the body-louse is a gentleman to the soul-louse that gnaws at the heart of every human. 'Tis all preying, and justice be no more than a vain word for something that don't exist and never did."

His bitterness missed Barry; but he took a fleeting glimpse into something deeper than he had seen before of his uncle's mind. It seemed to him, if pushed far enough, these opinions would stultify others that his uncle held, and make the old man's ruling passion a futile thing. He did not speak, and David rose to go to bed, reverting at the same moment, as it seemed, to his true self.

"Mean, am I? Who can be mean, or close, or even fair to himself that's built of human mud and chained up hand and soul in this cage we call life? Why should my shadow on the grass cool it for nothing? Why should I serve the blasted grass for no return? Tell me that. That's the spirit we're drove in from the cradle to the grave. The blood in our veins oft stinks of injustice, don't it? And the brains in our heads, likewise. The sins of the fathers are visited on the innocent children in every cottage in Princetown. Fegs! There's not a pin to choose 'twixt Providence and Duchy in my opinion!"

With this conclusion David shouted for his hot brick, pulled down the sleeves of his undervest for the hundredth time, and went to bed.

Barry also retired, and at the first glint of dawn was up again and away before even Mrs. Bascombe stirred. He started, indeed, earlier than the occasion required; but he had his own motives for so doing. A plot was afoot, and the first act would be played before the sun rose. He set off where the light only touched the pools in the rutted road from Nun's Cross, while behind him, under a net,

four little calves took their leave of mothers and home. Barry cursed the rough track which his uncle refused to mend. It was typical of David that he balanced the possible breaking of a spring in the market-cart against the cost of mending his private road, and decided that the former accident was the lesser of two evils. But Barry did not think so, and had argued more than once with his uncle when the latter flouted the labours of Telford and Macadam, fought Duchy on the subject, and declared that the old paths and the old days of pack-horse and pillion were best.

Then he met the heroine of the morn at the edge of Tor Royal plantations, where stood Anstice dressed in white, with a white straw hat. A long, thick waterproof covered her, and she carried a few clothes in a handbag. It contained, among other things, a little nightgown with pink bows, which her secret hands had manufactured in fear and trembling by night, when all lights were out but her own.

She was fluttered but thankful to meet Barry, and he greeted her kindly.

"Well done, you!" he said. "Now 'tis all over bar shouting. Afore mid-day you're going to be Mrs. Jimmy Worth, and not all White Works can undo it."

"All thanks to you," she answered. "We shall never, never forget what we owe you, dear Barry."

"It's only a bit of fun for me. If Uncle David don't turn on me after, I'm all right; and I don't much care if he do for that matter. I can get round him. But how did you manage? Did it all fall out as I told you it would?'"

"No," she said. "It did not. I've had the fright of my life, and was feared to death up to the last minute I'd never escape. I haven't been here twenty minutes. I didn't get out of the house till nearly four o'clock."

"That was running it late."

"I know it was. But a very unexpected thing happened. Father started a cruel toothache after supper, and though a wonder for bearing pain, yet there 'twas. Nothing could be done and he wouldn't go to bed, but smoked and walked the house for hour after hour. All our 'Pain-killer' was used up, and there wasn't anything for it but

to wait till to-day. But he went to bed at last, and I hope he'll wake better. They'll be a good bit frighted for me when they find I'm off."

"No, they won't," he answered. "They'll guess. It won't take a very witty man or woman to know where you are. James is going to send them a telegram as soon as the deed is done; and then the future will look after itself, and they can chew over it till you both come back."

"We're to buy our furniture in Plymouth on the hire system, Barry."

"Are you? Well, why not?"

"It's been a terrible business keeping the secret and going on living with everybody's eyes on me. James was away, and escaped that; but over and over again I was properly feared they'd find out, for I'm sure the truth was often staring out of my eyes for anybody to read."

"They did smell a rat. Your mother told mine she wasn't too sure things were as they should be."

"There's a lot I don't know myself till I see James again. How he got holiday enough to go down and make all right and proper, I don't know for one thing."

"I can tell you that much," answered her cousin. "There was a little bit of craft there. But keep it dark. You see, Sophia Edwards—you know—the daughter of Jimmy's boss at the Stores—well, I got it through another party that she was mighty sweet on 'Gentleman' Pascoe herself."

"I could have told you that," declared Anstice. "'Twas one of our great hopes that Charles would——"

"Well, he didn't. But when I whispered the plot to a woman that knows Sophia very well, and she explained to Sophia that, if Jimmy was to get away for a fortnight or so, it might mean Pascoe wouldn't marry you—then she set to work—all very clever and secret of course; because she's a clever woman. And the result was that James got his holiday, and Sophia, no doubt, is waiting terrible eager to know what comes of it."

"I'm sure I hope she'll be rewarded, if she wants Charles," declared Anstice. "He's a very good, high-minded man, and would make a fine husband for anybody that liked him. I feel nothing but kind to him—now."

To Barry's annoyance, they were seen by somebody who

knew them as they reached Princetown and turned, left-handed, into the Plymouth road. It was now light, and whiteness broke upon the east above a sulky bank of leaden-grey fog. Ben Halfyard, going to his forge, saw the pair and gave them good morning. They did not stop, though Barry expressed regret that anybody should have witnessed their departure.

"He'll see nobody to tell it to for hours yet, however, even if he wanted to," said Anstice, "and by the time Princetown's woke up I shall be beyond reach."

Great autumn rains had fallen, and more had yet to fall. Morning hope of fair weather was drowned before noon, and to-day the cloud cisterns began to lumber up from the south-west, as they drove by Devil's Bridge over the rolling road in the teeth of the wind. Morning touched the clouds with fleeting fires, and a thousand rivulets, that ran over the heather and drowned the sheep tracks, flashed back out of the sodden gloom. Beside every upstanding stone there lay a pool, and each grass hollow and old-time excavation was full of crystal clear water, with imprisoned air glimmering on the grass blades beneath. The risen sun fitfully swept the moor between storms, and even the fiercest, blackest torrent bursting out of the sky seemed to be fringed with September blue—that ineffable, rain-washed azure proper to the fall of the year. Now it ran along the hill-tops, to be reflected on the wet granite and in the pools and streams; now it broke from the very midst of the huddled cumuli—its lustre veiled by the curtains of the rain.

"I wish you were coming with me to see the end, Barry," said Anstice. "You've been a godsend to us—we shall never, never forget it."

"Only a bit of fun," he repeated.

"Much, much more than that. It would have been nice for you to be there and see the happiness you'd helped to bring about."

"No, no. I must go on with the calves. As for you, I'm going to drop you at Yelverton. That's safest. If you'd waited for the morning train from Princetown, 'tis any odds there'd have been them in the carriage to ask questions. But there's not like to be anybody you know at Yelverton."

"I wish I was going to drive all the way to Plymouth alongside you all the same," she said. "I'd feel safer."

"You're safe enough—nobody was ever safer," he assured her, and knowing the circumstances, none might have doubted the fact. Yet utmost danger threatened and drew nearer. Not two miles behind Barry's trotting horse another trap was on the road swinging steadily along. It was drawn by a swifter and more powerful steed than David Mortimer's elderly roan, and it contained two very anxious men. One drove; the other stood up from time to time to mark the progress of the vehicle ahead. They were proceeding upon a certain calculation arrived at in argument as they drove, now hanging back, now pushing forward, according as the trap in front went slowly up a hill or quickly down one.

Here rode the father of Anstice, while Charles Pascoe held the reins. A chapter of accidents had given the fugitive into their hands, and while unconsciously she proceeded, the argument behind her was merely between a choice of actions, both destructive to her hopes.

Nathan's sufferings had early awakened him after fitful slumber and, craving a cup of tea, he had risen and gone to Anstice rather than awaken his wife. He knew that she would think it no hardship to get up and light the fire. She had not, however, gone to bed, and when her father, candle in hand, looked into her room, he discovered it empty. The hour was just after four o'clock, and Anstice had not been out of the house ten minutes. But she enjoyed a good start, for there was much to be done before pursuit could follow.

Nathan, forgetting his toothache—indeed it was shocked away for a time—called May, and she directed him to dress at once and seek Charles Pascoe.

She's off to him at Plymouth, and there's only two ways for her to go—by road or rail," said Mrs. Mortimer. "The morning train don't start till six, so if she's bound for that you can stop her easy; but she's more like to be on the high road to Yelverton, to pick up the Plymouth train there. It's up to Charles—and you'd best to go along with him."

Thus she quickly defined the situation, and in half an hour Mr. Pascoe had accepted the facts and braced himself to operate.

He rose at the summons of Nathan, dressed with speed, and soon harnessed his horse into a light gig. At the moment when Anstice and Barry were bidding Ben Halfyard 'Good morning,' Mr. Mortimer and the master of Strane Steps set out, and they drove far faster than Barry had done. They stopped a moment, seeing the forge doors open. Thus they learned that Barry and Anstice, in a market-cart containing calves, were on the Plymouth road, but twenty minutes ahead of them.

The pair were soon sighted as daylight waxed, and Pascoe considered their best course.

"We can do one of two things," he said. "Either we can overtake them as quickly as possible—we shall catch them by the time they get to Dousland Barn if we want to—or else we can just keep them in sight and watch what is doing. If your nephew's driving calves, it's clear that he's just giving her a lift and isn't going to take her the whole way. No doubt your wife's right, and he'll drop her at Yelverton. Then he'll either go on his way, or else he'll stop and see her into the train. Of course, she mustn't get in. We will reason with her, and I hope reason will be enough. But you can see in a minute that, if Barry Worth leaves her and goes on his way, it will be simpler for us than if he stops and endeavours to oppose us."

Nathan admitted this, and they determined to hang behind in hope that the pair ahead would presently part. If that happened their difficulties would be much diminished, and presently the thing they desired occurred; for, at Roborough, Barry stopped and took leave of his cousin, while Mr. Pascoe pulled up and backed round a corner two hundred yards behind.

"It is just as it should be," he said to Nathan Mortimer. "Nothing happens by chance—otherwise Providence would fail. The young man is dropping her at the road down to Yelverton Station."

Meantime Barry took farewell of Anstice, and again she thanked him very gratefully, with tears in her eyes. He noticed them, and gave her advice.

"You mustn't be so sentimental," he said. "It's not a bit of good being sentimental, Anstice, as I've told Jimmy a score of times. 'Tis all foolishness, and it only

makes you suffer a lot you needn't suffer. The weak sort are the losers all round. Uncle David said that last night. They get hurt and bruised and trod on at every turn—and deserve to be. So you put a bolder front on it, and when you get hard words and cusses over this job, as you doubtless will, you just scorn 'em. You've done right to go to James, and you always keep that uppermost in your mind and make him do the same."

"You're so wise," she said. Then he gave her pretty mouth a kiss, wished her good luck, and went on his way, while she turned down to the station. Arrived there, Anstice found the booking-office not yet open, so she went to an automatic machine upon the platform and secured two pieces of chocolate. She was eating, with her little handbag beside her, when Charles Pascoe and her father arrived at the station. They approached, and her chocolate fell from her hand, for she nearly fainted at the sight of them.

Pascoe remained in the background, while Nathan first addressed his erring child. He was in pain, and the side of his face had much swollen. But he did not speak harshly.

"Thank God, we're in time," he said. "I can't trust myself to tell you all I feel about it, Anstice; but that don't matter. I've saved you from yourself, thanks to Charles here. This ain't a moment for talking. You'll live to remember this day, no doubt, and bless them who have saved you."

"But, father—please—please. You don't understand. You can't separate us now. It's all arranged. He's waiting for me."

"These things are all arranged, as you say," answered Nathan, "and it's Higher Hands than ours that arrange them, Anstice. The Lord never meant this to happen—did He, Charles?"

Then Mr. Pascoe approached. He was admirably collected, shook hands with the girl, and showed his teeth in a smile.

"Good morning, dear Anstice!" he said. "You know how I've always wanted to do something for you—something that really counted; and now, you see, I have; for there's nothing better than saving a dear friend from

errors and mistakes. And, thanks to my good horse and your good father, I've done it. Or, I should say, thanks to Providence, for I hope now you'll see clearly, my dear, that this was never meant to be, and mustn't be. I don't say anything about myself, you notice. I'm merely the tool in Higher Hands, as your father so truly said just now. But you'll think over all that and see it rightly another time."

She stared from one to the other with open lips, as the wounded creature that hears a dog coming. She could have cried out to Barry, but knew that he was far away. Strangely enough she remembered, at this harsh juncture, the last words that he had said to her; but a fleeting thought to try and fight was swiftly swamped in the flowing exposition of Mr. Pascoe.

He made it clear that, in his opinion, Anstice had to thank her guardian angel for a great escape.

"I'm rejoicing too much over you even to think of anything else, Anstice. I'm rejoicing to think you've got your whole life before you to repay your Maker for this great miracle on your behalf. For it is a miracle, and, though all the result of natural causes, still a miracle worked for you by the Creator of the universe. You can't deny it, Mr. Mortimer, can you?"

"I don't," said Nathan. "She'll see it, too, clear enough, some day; and so will my nephew, James. Yes, I do honestly say, Anstice, that though James will feel his morning be spoilt in a manner of speaking, when you don't join him, as you plotted so wrongly to do, yet, as the years go over James, and time heals the wounds, he'll know exactly the same as what you will, that 'twas the act of a watchful God to keep you apart. And I hope you'll remember His humble instruments—namely, me and Charles—when the time comes to do so. You owe your father something, if 'tis only the great deed he's done for you, though racked with frightful pains himself; and you owe Charles far more, because but for him we could never have got here."

"We mean nothing but goodness and tenderness, dear Anstice," said Mr. Pascoe, "and to show you that we do, I may say that, at this very moment, I'm thinking not only for you, but for that misguided young man who'll

be waiting for you, no doubt, in half an hour's time, at Plymouth."

"At North Road he was to meet me," she said, in a voice as hollow as the whisper of the wind. She was dazed. She forgot herself, and her mind now passed to James. She saw him waiting.

"Then, if you wish it, and your father approves, I will take train myself and meet him, and explain to him how forces above and beyond our own control have preserved you both, so that your feet slipped not," said Pascoe. "Does that idea commend itself to you, Anstice?"

She stared at him, and saw him descending upon James.

"Let me go to him—for God's love let me go to him! We won't be married—I promise that—if you'll only let me go! Nobody else can break it to him but me," she implored.

Charles looked at her father, and he spoke.

"You shall neither of you go," he said. "I'll go. I'll kill two birds with one stone—James and this here raging tooth. You can trust me to be kind to my nephew, and it's an added blessing, among many, for you, my girl, that this matter fell into the hands of such a soft man as me and such a gentleman as Charles. There's plenty as would have taken this affair in a very rough spirit. For you was doing a rash and wilful thing, and we mustn't disguise that from you or James. But it all falls out quite convenient, and I can't do better than go down. And I hope James will take it in the same sensible and Christian spirit as what you will. For that's the least you can do. We've returned good for your evil, and treated you in a forgiving manner. And it's your turn now. And I'll faithfully promise I'll be no fiercer with James than what I've been with you; though, as the man and the dark one who planned this thing, no doubt he's the most to blame."

"We'll cast no stone, however," declared Charles. "Far from it; we'll give thanks on our knees, Anstice, that we've been employed on such a high matter as the salvation of two souls. For that's hardly too high to put it when you think what might have been. And, if your good father will go down to Plymouth, then I'll drive you home."

"I implore you, I implore you, if ever you loved me, let me go along with father. 'Twill soften it for James."

"I love you very much indeed, Anstice, and I'm entirely in your father's hands. But I'm sure we feel alike about that. We've been guided wonderfully in this matter from the moment we started, and, in a word, I don't think it would be wise for you to go to Plymouth."

"Not a chance," said Mr. Mortimer. "I'll go, and be back as soon as I can. And you can trust me to explain the facts so that James can see we merely did as we were led to do. James is a very religious man—or was—and——"

"Train's in the tunnel," said Mr. Pascoe.

Whereupon Nathan broke off and hastened to get his ticket.

They stood by the carriage for a few moments after he had entered it, and he looked out, holding his face.

"Have no fear for James," he said. "Of all men, I'm the right and proper one to break this good news to him, and I shall do it so that he'll see and feel it is good news."

"Nothing better could you say," declared Pascoe.

In five minutes he was helping Anstice into his gig, and, as they reached the great hill back to the moor, he alighted and walked beside his horse. Thus she was left with her thoughts, and they tended towards self-destruction. For a fleeting moment she felt it would be better to die. Then she remembered Barry, and strove to be hard. This effort took the form of hoping that James would also be hard and that, though foiled on this occasion, he might try again.

Yet she knew in her heart he would not.

Her eyes fell on the back of Charles Pascoe as he walked ahead. She remembered all the things that he had told her, and she wondered vaguely if he really believed that he had been sent by Providence to keep her away from James. She decided that he must believe it. Her father also must believe it. Her grief was very great, but she felt very little anger against those who had brought her dream to ruin.

Pascoe spoke kindly to her when he returned to her side, and did not press himself upon her in any way. It seemed that they would never be back again; yet White

Works appeared at last. It was raining heavily when they returned and Anstice stood beside her mother.

Elsewhere, Mr. Mortimer had met James at North Road Station. The young man was wearing a new mouse-coloured suit, with a white rose in his buttonhole. He also carried a bouquet of white roses, destined for his bride.

CHAPTER XIV

SURRENDER

Barry delivered his calves, returned to Nun's Cross at four o'clock, and told his uncle that he had been amazed to meet Anstice, and had driven her, at her request, to the railway station at Yelverton. Presently, after tea, he strolled down to White Works that he might learn the sequel. He expected to find the little colony full of excitement, for every inhabited house therein would participate vitally in the significance of this adventure. Instead he met emotion indeed, but of a kind very different from his hopes.

Damaris explained, and it was typical of Barry that, while he had run some risks for the sake of the plot and his brother, as soon as he heard the facts, he thought of himself. His own share in the business had been taken with due precaution, and he was not alarmed, but only concerned to clear himself in David Mortimer's eyes as quickly as possible. He listened with immense interest to the story, for Damaris had received particulars from Anstice herself soon after her return.

"And Uncle Nathan's just back from Plymouth, where he went to see James and have his tooth out," explained Damaris. "I haven't seen him, because he's very much fatigued and he's gone to bed. And what he said to James, of course, we don't know yet. But it's all over now. Poor Anstice seems to be quite resigned about it. She says that evidently God never meant it to happen."

"Of all the little fools! If I'd only guessed that pair was behind, I'd have stopped with her."

"You couldn't have done anything, Barry. It wasn't your business. Lucky you didn't stop, for you'd have lost your temper, very like, and made trouble."

"She'd only got to defy them. She's grown up. They couldn't have stopped her under the law. Damn it, she's free to do what she likes, isn't she?"

"She's too meek to defy anybody. In a way you'd almost think she was glad. It seems absurd, after all her poor little plans and her cleverness in hiding her secret; but the relief to Anstice, in feeling she's under command of stronger than herself, lessens the bitterness of failure, I do believe. Mr. Pascoe was very kind."

"Well, let it be clearly understood that it's nothing to do with me," said Barry. "I'm very sorry for James, though I daresay there's not much to be sorry for. And of course, the plot, so to call it, is not mine. Anstice knew I was off with light to-day, and so she laid in wait to get a lift, and I thought, naturally, she's got leave to go and see James and never bothered about her or him."

Damaris laughed.

"You crafty toad!" she said. "As if everybody don't know very well you was in it, up to the eyes probably, if you didn't plan it all. 'Twas much more like your work than anything James would hatch."

"You mustn't say that, even if you think it," he answered. "I've got Uncle David to consider, and he'd better hear of this nonsense from me and not another."

Then his mother came in, and he took occasion to explain that his name must not be linked with the futile event of the day. Mary had just returned from the home of her brother.

"I went up and saw your Uncle Nathan in bed," she said. "He's very tired, and the man that drawed his tooth hurt him a good deal. He met James at the station, and James took it sadly, but didn't make a scene. He's coming home to-morrow, poor chap, and the sooner the better. He'll see how the Lord's hand is in it—same as Anstice appears to do. They are all holding in very well, and with Anstice the only way is to be kind and gentle. They know that—her mother understands—and she hasn't heard a harsh word, I believe."

Barry sniffed scornfully.

"She ought to, then. Get me a pencil and paper and envelope, Damaris," he said. "I'll write half a line to James. He knows—well, no matter; but I'll leave a letter for you to give him so soon as he turns up."

He wrote, explaining to his brother that his name must not appear. "I did my best, and through no fault of mine

we failed," he said, " and I'd try again to-morrow ; I hate being done. But keep my name out of it. I've said I met Anstice waiting for me, much to my surprise, and, of course, thought all was right. It won't hurt you to say that, and it may hurt me if Uncle David thought I was helping you."

Then, again impressing upon his mother that he was innocent, Barry went back to Nun's Cross and told his tale with great affectation of surprise.

David listened grimly while his nephew rattled on.

" And such a poor, go-by-the-ground girl as Anstice don't seem to be worth fighting for," he concluded. " If, after all their plotting and planning, she hadn't the pluck to withstand a man like Paseoe, but threw up the sponge and went home with her tail between her legs, then James, who's just so feeble himself, be well out of it. No doubt you're right about women, same as you are about most things."

" I'm to understand they hatched this out between 'em, then, and that Anstice got wind of your going to Buckland to-day and stood in the path and told you she was bound for Plymouth to see James, and asked for a lift ? "

" That's how it was, uncle."

The old man rose to retire.

" Nephew," he said, " larn something. You can't go through this world without straining the truth sometimes ; but never you lie without good reason, and never you lie to me again, for any reason whatever, because you might hurt yourself. The rest will believe you, no doubt, being simple people. I do not. You ran this job, and you hatched this falsehood—for me, because t'others didn't matter, but I did. And it so happens that the one man you wanted to think you had no hand in the job knows very well you had. I forgive you, but never again. No man plays hookem-snivey with me twice."

He departed and left Barry to his reflections. He slept ill, and next morning took occasion to see his uncle.

" Never again, Uncle David," was all he said ; and he meant it, for he was fully conscious of his escape and also fully conscious of the significance of forgiveness. That David could pardon him argued an interest in him—even a friendly feeling towards him—that awoke keen gratitude.

At present he was not concerned for the future, or any ultimate return for his activity at Nun's Cross. He felt a lively sense that the old man had treated him better than he deserved, and determined to let his acknowledgments take active shape. Unconsciously he was already a good deal under his elder's influence, and this blunt challenge and free pardon moved him. Something akin to enthusiasm awoke in Barry; a wholehearted desire to please his uncle now fired his purpose. He was not particularly ashamed of himself. Older and cleverer men than he had doubtless been seen through by David Mortimer. He did not think the master of Nun's Cross would expose him, nor did he much care now if that happened. For if David had really forgiven him, the opinion of others mattered nothing.

In this mood he proceeded with his life, and found presently that his uncle kept the truth to himself. For the rest, only James and Anstice knew it, and they did not revert to the matter. Nor had any the heart to cross-question them. The incident, indeed, was only significant for its effect on the future.

James duly returned, and won the sympathetic tears of his mother and sister. He was very quiet, sad and resigned. He begged that they would not discuss the matter farther, and took the first opportunity to see Anstice. No effort was made to keep them apart, for her mother knew that little need now existed.

The sentimentalists were disarmed. For they were fatalists, too, as the weak are very wont to be. They wandered together, and Anstice told James the things that Charles Pascoe had said to her, and James declared that, in the destruction of their plans, appeared deliberate intervention of higher powers than man or woman might resist.

They were inconceivably unhappy.

"Many a man would fight on," said James, "and try again; and many a man, once convinced it couldn't be, would commit suicide and ask you to do the same."

But Anstice did not trouble to protest or even tell him she had thought of that also. The depth of feeling that must precede any real or serious thought of self-destruction was beyond her power. And she guessed that it was

beyond his. She merely shook her head, but felt no fear. Her answer indicated self-knowledge, quickened by recent events.

"We can suffer; we can't act," she said. "'Tis no fault of ours; it's the way we're made."

"To know it ought to be to better it," he argued. "To know we're weak ought to make us stronger, Anstice."

"Fate is against us," she answered.

Instinct took them to their Aunt Sarah not seldom at this time. She had been crossed in love—it was a family tradition, though none knew the facts—and she was deeply sympathetic; but she could not console.

Anstice spoke of fate, and Sarah was too wise to contradict her.

"'Tis said we make our own fate," declared Sarah; "but that seems to me an easy thing to say and only sounds deep—it isn't really."

"That's what I know," answered James, "and I've explained it to myself and Anstice too. I thought that finding we are weak ought to make us stronger; because in most things, if you know where a matter is out of gear, that's half-way to putting it right. But it is different with people, and seeing your faults is a great deal easier than curing them."

"So much depends on life, James," answered the old woman. "Sometimes a fault won't defeat a man's usefulness, or stand between him and what he wants. There's faults you see people take to the grave, and they're none the worse for 'em apparently. Life hasn't threatened 'em and driven 'em to mend, and so they haven't mended. But more often we are called to see and feel that our faults, whatever they may be, are coming between us and success. That's life's usual way. Your Uncle David is a man whose faults have never stood in his chosen way, and so he'd never grant they were faults; but for me and you, and most of us, our faults find us out quick enough."

"'Tis cruel hard and bitter hard, all the same, that the meek and gentle should be punished and driven from their hopes, like us," said Anstice.

"So 'tis, then; for to be meek and gentle is a very Christian thing indeed, and worthy of all praise; but Christianity wants better bread than is made of wheat,

and asks human nature to be different from what it is. 'Tis higher than human nature, and that's why, though we call ourselves Christians, we very seldom are. Few can be, I suppose, along of their natures. The proper end of real Christianity, so far as I can see, is to be crucified with Christ, and that's the last thing as men or women are inclined to be. 'Tis only very great people that can do so splendidly right as to be crucified for it. And you two, with your natures—'tis your only hope to fall back upon the sure belief you are doing right by yielding to the wishes of your elders. Life's dealt hard by you; but not unjustly. You're near in blood, and many wise people think that's a danger for one thing; and you're far too much alike to make a very good match. And James here, wanting your happiness above all else, knows very well that, with one of the old-fashioned, steadfast sort, like Mr. Pascoe, you are safe as wit of man can make you—safe and honoured and respected, and well cared for."

"You feel it must be, then?" asked James. "We think a lot of your opinion, because there's a whisper in the family you know what it is."

"I do, James. I suffered a very great deal forty-seven years ago."

"And would you say, looking back, the right thing happened, if one may ask, Aunt Sarah?"

"I don't know, Anstice. I never shall know."

"I feel that, if I took Mr. Pascoe, it's being false to James."

"No, you mustn't feel that," said the man. "We've gone to the greatest lengths we could. We did what for such as us was a very great thing. We left no stone unturned to come together. But the little we left to Providence, Providence wouldn't do. In fact, Providence turned against us."

"A very open-minded way to look at it, James," answered Sarah; "because in your honest mind it follows that, if Providence didn't help you, after you'd helped yourselves so clever, and put all your skill and thought into it, then there was a very good reason against."

"I feel we must have been watched," said James. "Eyes were on us—not human eyes, I don't mean; but Eyes you can't throw dust in; and plot was answered

with plot, and plan with plan; and, of course, you can't plot against Providence unless you're a fool."

"You can trace it all to father's toothache," said Anstice.

"You can, my dear. 'Tis just small things like that the Lord uses."

"And so you'd say to try again after such a downfall would be wrong, I suppose?" asked James.

"What do you feel yourself? No, James, you've got to look at Anstice from a new point of view and a loftier one. You've got to know you mustn't wed her."

"If I don't, I shall love her just the same, because that can't be helped."

"Not just the same—better—higher. And, if she takes another, she'll love you still, but in a grander sort of way."

"We can both rise up to loving in a grander sort of way without marrying other people," argued Anstice. "If we can't wed each other, that's no reason why I should marry somebody else. And James won't—will you, James?"

"I swear to God I never shall," he said.

"As to that," answered their aunt, "I'm not going to speak. That may or may not come about; but if I can make you feel, harsh though it is, that you can love each other on a very fine pattern without taking each other in marriage, then I've done you a good turn, I hope and believe. Once you get to grasp that, then the future will clear itself, and you'll better judge as to what you may or may not owe to other people."

"Damn other people!" cried James, whose rare expletives were like a blackbird's, noisy but futile. "What do we owe other people? They've done nothing for us. It's for me and Anstice to get our own feelings right to each other under this shattering thing. It may make us love one another grander, at the cost of cruel and bitter grief and pain; but it won't make us love other people grander. We're only flesh and blood, and I hate other people—every damned one of 'em, and shall for evermore."

"A very natural feeling," answered Sarah calmly, "and only time can be trusted to alter it."

Thus on several occasions they talked, and Miss Mortimer knew that their minds were sinking into acceptation of the inevitable.

Many others, too, were at work upon the hapless pair. None had much blamed them, for even in May Mortimer was some sense of the hardship they had endured and their present tribulation; but one judged somewhat more hardly, and Rebecca Pascoe, when the full magnitude of the stroke for liberty came to her ears, felt her opinion of Anstice suffer a change. Indeed, for a time, she took a very dark view of the incident, and declared that it threw a flood of painful light on the young woman's character.

"To come it over her betters in such a way properly makes one gasp," said Mr. Pascoe's aunt; "and if one didn't know they meek ones very nearly always have a share of cunning, one wouldn't believe the facts. But there's no denying them, and I feel terrible uneasy about it, because a woman that would do such a dangerous thing—what wouldn't she do? You'll be wise to think twice and again, Charles, afore this rebellion. And I shan't never feel the same to her, whatever happens."

"I don't look at it like that," he told her. "On the face of it your view might be justified, but I go deeper. The blame belongs elsewhere, and she was driven into this. 'Tis quite out of her character to do such a thing: I see that clear enough."

But Miss Pascoe was not convinced.

"Where there's no feeling for law and order," she said, "you can't properly be said to know how you stand."

"I regard it as the passing error of a young mind," explained Charles. It was as though a benevolent spider had frankly pardoned a fly for trying to escape his web.

"When middle-age wants to get anything out of youth," he continued, "middle-age has got to be patient. These things have delayed me, that's all. Do not think darkly of Anstice. In fact, you are too good a Christian, Aunt Rebecca, to think darkly of anybody. For my part, I remember very well what it was to be young, and I hope I always shall."

'Gentleman' Pascoe pursued his destiny in this large but determined spirit, and, since all tirelessly assisted him,

the end was not long delayed. Anstice and James parted one evening with implicit, but unspoken, assurance that it was not enough they should remain apart. The inconsequence and broken grief of their conversations were poignant and distracting. Set out in words they had meant nothing; but by lapses and silences, by the tears of the woman and the sighs of the man, they were linked into a coherent whole for both of them, and they understood at last that the battle was over.

James became light-headed for a season, and disappeared through a long Sunday on which he knew that Anstice would be called to accept Pascoe. He walked many miles over the featureless vastness of Cator's Beam, and, in the agony of surrender, returned to the thought of death. His part was the harder, for the woman had immense applause to support her: the adulation of her family, fame at Princetown, and the gallant delight and fair promises of Charles. But when that whirling day was done, and the grovelling of her father and mother ended, the throbbing of an aching head, the stinging of nightly tears, kept Anstice waking, while the stars swept across the square of her chicket window. Then she suffered for a space what James had all day endured.

May Mortimer described her triumph to her sister-in-law, Sarah, on Monday morning.

"'Tis done, and well done," she said. "Our patience be rewarded, and we're five years younger, Nathan and me."

"She's took Pascoe?"

"She has. It happened yesterday, and, by signs in the morning, I felt it was going to be. He come in as usual, and was at her in his steady, even way. They was left, as usual, after tea, and—in less than half an hour—he'd got her. She's a bit dazed this morning; but we shall watch her mighty close—day and night, you may say; and the banns go up Sunday. And I want for you to make much of her, Sarah, and encourage her all you know. You can help us a lot, if you will. We've praised her till we're tongue-tired. And now I'm hopeful her gowns and things will keep her mind content. We'm going to Tavistock to-morrow. I was for Plymouth, but she's stuck out against that. Of course, Plymouth be a painful subject still; so we drive to Tavistock."

Sarah promised to do what she might.

"Please God, time will show the proper thing's happened. We mustn't forget James."

But Mrs. Mortimer was not concerned with James.

"He's too shallow to feel deep," she said. "He'll soon get over it. God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, as be well known."

CHAPTER XV

PRINCIPLES

A WEEK before the wedding of Anstice and Charles Pascoe, the latter came to see Nathan Mortimer. His betrothed and her mother were away at Tavistock till night, and he found his future father-in-law alone.

They appeared to agree in their views and opinions, and any doubt as to the future happiness of his daughter, which Nathan may have entertained, had vanished on closer knowledge of the man. For here, surely, was one of substance and judgment; one from whom even his elders might profitably learn. Nathan was metaphysical, and he found Charles also inclined to abstractions. Thus, while they met not seldom to discuss the business of the marriage, some chance word or thought frequently led their conversation from practice to theory.

It happened now, for Charles asserted that, given true affection, married life rarely failed.

"Affection ain't enough, however," replied his future father-in-law. "Affection's the paint in the pot to make the place a pretty colour; but by the bricks and mortar the house will stand. And affection ain't what you might call a fast colour, anyway: there's a lot of things can fade it."

"Depends on the quality, of course."

"No, it don't. The quality varies, I grant. But no love can be relied upon to weather a whole lifetime, Charles. 'Tis the mutual respect lasts. And that's only got by each party being jealous for themselves. A time comes between the best-regulated pairs when there's a slow, unseen drag as to which be the leading hoss; and then the stronger will generally forges in front. Take me, for example; they'll tell you I be held under the thumb of my wife. So the people think; but what matters what they think, so long as I know? My wife has a strong will, as you've seen, and all the better for me she has; but, when I saw my own stepping-stones slipping

away under the flood, I said to myself, ' Let 'em go, but cleave to one here and there, and hold it against any odds, else you'll lose your self-respect.' "

" Did you ? " asked Pascoe, much interested.

" I did. Take this pipe in my hand. No doubt, knowing my wife properly hates tobacco, it will surprise you to see me smoking as I do in every chamber of this house, when I like and as oft as I like. You'd say, ' Here's a man as meek as Moses to the eye, and yet, where his pipe's the matter, he has his way remorseless.' But so it is ; I gave up a lot, because running water wears away a stone, and the steady pull of that woman's will I found to be worse for my nerves than anything on earth. But ' no,' I said. ' She may lead in most things, but I'm damned if she shall put out my pipe.' If I'd given up my pipe, it would have very like broke up the home, for my self-respect must certainly have gone with it. I'm telling you these things in strict confidence, Charles, as my future son and a student of human nature. But so it was : in the matter of tobacco I was iron, and wouldn't budge for prayers or tears. I've smoked my mouth sore many a time—for nought but self-respect. And in her secret heart my wife admired me for it. 'Twas the sign and token for her that she had married a man ; because 'tis a curious thing with getting your own way—especially if you be the woman—you don't respect the party that lets you have it. Marriage, in fact, be a tedious test to the wittiest of us ; but there's just a few general principles you've got to cling to like death, and one is to keep up your end of the stick by night and day in something, and get your own way somewhere. Failing that, the whole contrivance will come to nought."

Mr. Pascoe doubted not the truth of these sentiments.

" One can wed, but it takes two to make a marriage, no doubt," he said.

" Yes ; the wife's the light of the house, but the husband should take care to be the candlestick," continued Nathan. " And, strictly between ourselves, I don't say I've got that position by any means ; but in your case the problems are a bit different. Anstiee is as gentle as a lamb, and you'll have no trouble with her as to the lead. But you're old enough to be her father, and that's a situation

that breeds its own riddles. She's very pretty, and what you may have to face, Charles, be the pangs of jealousy. You think that couldn't happen. All middle-aged men do, till they wed a young woman. You'll certainly have no call to be jealous. Still, 'tis well to be prepared for everything."

"I can't say as the idea has struck me. The level, balanced mind ought not to feel any low emotion like that. I've got a lifetime behind me, remember."

"I know. I'm talking of what you've got in front. You're entering upon a new experience, and you come to it very well fitted to endure it, I believe; but you mustn't argue from the past to the future, because the one don't bear on the other. Marriage, in fact, is being born again, into a new and a strange world."

"My rules and regulations are suited to all conditions, I hope. Right is still right, though you're married or single, and my invariable experience is that if you do right, you'll be rewarded for it in everything. I've seen it happen all my life."

"It don't hold, unfortunately. Many do right and get nought. We've all seen 'em."

"That is so," admitted Charles; "but in such cases you've got to look under the surface, Mr. Mortimer. What you see is only the appearance. When a man looks to be doing right and still ain't getting on, then you may be sure of the reason. And the reason is that the Lord of Salvation knows a great deal more about that man than we do. The reason for the failure is secret sin in most cases. Such a man haven't got his heart right with God, and he's doing right on a wrong foundation if you understand me."

"Very interesting; but take my brother. How d'you account for him and his success?"

"As one going to enter the family, I'll say nothing against him," answered Charles, with caution. "My wife-to-be is his niece and, as such, has her claim upon him. But I understand him. I don't count him a righteous man, however, and I wouldn't have you think so."

"He's hard as the nether millstone, and never done a kind act or thought a kind thought from the day he was short-coated."

"A dreadful picture. I hope it may be my privilege to throw a little light for him presently."

"Do you? You're a hopeful man, then."

"Yes. The unrighteous flourish like the green bay tree, and the Lord allows it. I'm not denying that; but in Mr. David's case he stands self-condemned, if I may venture to say so—for why? Because he turns his back on the light and goes neither to church nor chapel. You needn't fear that he'll be overlooked, however. His Maker's sleepless eye is on him, and with what measure he metes, it will be meted to him again, I'm afraid."

"Have you sent him your invite?"

"I have, and he's coming—not to the wedding, but to the feast after."

"You understand that I'll pay half of all, Charles; but, as a poor man, I can't do it in the style you've a right to expect."

"Leave that to me. We've decided for the wedding breakfast to be given at 'The Plume of Feathers.' 'Twill save my aunt a lot of trouble, and as Anstice and I catch the afternoon train from Princetown for the honeymoon, it will be more convenient every way."

"A very good idea. You're wise to arrange it like that. As for David, he's never been known to refuse a free feed. That's why he always goes to the Duchy Court Dinner."

"I've asked his head man and Mrs. Bascombe also, for I know they are very highly respected."

"A great compliment for them, and a very kind thought on your part."

"Miss Sophia Edwards, however, can't come, I'm sorry to say, nor yet her father. That's a disappointment, because, as you know, they are great friends of mine."

Mr. Mortimer nodded, but did not reply. In common with others, he was aware that the daughter of the general store keeper entertained personal admiration for Mr. Pascoe.

"As you know, we take our honeymoon at Bude, beside the sea. Anstice has never been by the sea to stop, and I think the ocean will distract her mind. The air, too, has a very good name. How do you find her going on, if I may ask?"

"She's all right. Given time and patience, I feel pretty

hopeful the future will unroll very comfortable. I didn't once—I confess, Charles. But now I do. You're taking a very good line. Don't try to be too young, or pretend you see life through her eyes, because you can't do that. 'Tis for her to give up the ideas and ways of youth, not for you to give up being middle-aged and acting according. You can hurry youth on, but you can't put years back."

"True; but I should be very sorry to age her. That wouldn't be kind, or Christian. I'm going to fling myself into our little holiday and be a boy again."

"Well, go your way; and if we can help you at any time, let us know. I should say, without feeling, that she's not liking me and her mother any too well at the bottom of her heart for the minute—not that she shows it openly. She's very dutiful and resigned."

"I don't want her to be resigned," declared Charles. "I shall soon show her there is not the least need for resignation. I want her to find marriage enlarge her mind and increase her powers and influence—also her happiness, and even her freedom. She'll be free as air—free and happy both."

"I'm sure you'll strike the right note and she'll respond to it. She often says you're kind. By all means let her be as free as you can. She loves freedom, like all young things."

Mr. Pascoe prepared to go.

"Has she done with Josephus? Because, if so, I'll take it back with me."

"She's not got time for reading much just now."

"She'll be able to resume it later on."

"Yes, but don't drive her at it. I've dipped in myself, and found it a thought heavy-going even for the elderly mind. A tale or two might be more in her line."

"Surely fact is better than fiction. Story-books are really only a form of falsehood, remember."

Charles took Josephus and went his way.

CHAPTER XVI

RETURN FROM THE WEDDING

The people were returning from Princetown after the wedding. The day had been frosty and full of sunshine; the wedded pair were gone; the dinner at 'The Plume of Feathers' was eaten, and had given satisfaction to twenty people.

Perhaps none enjoyed the unusual fare so well as David's head man, Jack Bascombe. To begin with, he and his wife, Jenny, held it a great compliment that they should be asked at all. They were returning to Nun's Cross in their Sunday clothes, and since the moor was dry, they walked together by the most direct route—that which took them along the forest boundary beside South Hessary Tor.

"A very brave come-along-of-it," said Mr. Bascombe, "and I hope a deed begun so well will end likewise. They Mortimers are very fortunate, for Nathan's so poor as a coot in truth—I've heard master say so—and to have their one and only wedded to a good and prosperous man is a great blessing."

"She looked sadly, however."

"They will at such a time. But 'Gentleman' Pascoe be a man of great judgment. No doubt he's read her character, and feels sure as she's the right one. In fullness of days she'll grow to see what a man he is."

"Master don't like him, however."

"He don't like anybody."

"He made an amazing meal. 'Tis wonderful how a man, as lives so spare at home, can let himself go among the victuals when somebody else is paying for 'em."

"I see Jane Bond in the church," said Jack, and Jenny sighed.

"Our poor boy's suffering a lot. A hard little devil, she is—and all for a joke. Master says 'tis a good judgment on him for taking up with a girl at all. And he also

says that the man who's fool enough to think that any woman could see a joke deserves what he gets."

"I hope it will come right, I'm sure."

Barry Worth overtook them on their rough path, for he, too, was returning to Nun's Cross.

"Enjoyed yourself, Jaek?" he asked.

"Enjoyed myself? Look at my buttons!" answered the head man, and indeed his waistcoat flapped in the wind.

"I can't call home such a hugeous feast since my own wedding day," he continued: "then Jenny's folk did us amazing fine. No sparkling champagne, of course; but though I might have had a drop to-day, I did not. 'Twouldn't neighbour with beer, I reckon."

Barry was gloomy.

"A damned bad day's work, if you ask me," he said. "I wanted my brother to try again and get her. I'd have helped again, too; and I'd have seen it through myself next time; but, no—he's too soft—poor wretch. However, they may change their feeble minds yet."

"You oughtn't to say that, Mr. Barry. She's married now."

"Blast the girls!" snorted young Worth. "I'm beginning to reckon my uncle's right. They're more trouble than they're worth, Jenny."

"I hope you'll live to find different."

"Where's the old man?"

"He was going to give some of the party a lift back in the trap," said Mr. Bascombe.

"Was it true that honey in the comb was taken to the feed by him? My mother said he'd brought it."

"Not him! He drove ten pound of the new honey to Princetown to Edwards's. He don't give his honey away at parties."

"So I thought."

"Poor Mr. James couldn't let down his food at the feast, for I watched him," said Jenny. "My eyes was drawed to him somehow. He drank the bride's health, however."

"'Twas a brave act to come in my opinion, and showed a forgiving spirit," declared Bascombe.

But mention of his brother irritated Barry.

"Jimmy's a worm," he said, "and I'll see myself in hell before I offer to help any man over a stile again."

Then he pushed on and left the elderly couple to go their own gait. But twenty minutes later his determination to stand aloof from help of his fellow-creatures henceforth was challenged, for there loomed up the melancholy inches of Little Jack, who sat on a stone near Nun's Cross and waited to see him.

"My day's work be done," he said, "and knowing you were all making holiday, I thought to myself 'twas very like you'd be coming back along about now; and I was right. And all the better since you're alone. Can I have a tell, Mr. Barry?"

"Talk while I walk, then. I must get back to the milking."

"The master ban't back?"

"No, 'twill be dark before he's back. He won't see you."

"I'm in a proper woful quandary," said Little Jack, "and, in a manner of speaking, 'tis your fault. Not a word against you, God knows, for that's the last thing in my mind; but you gave me some advice a bit ago—leastways you told me that 'tis worth while falling out with your female for the pleasure of making it up. And, thinking a lot of your opinion, I done so. And it all went very well indeed till the time came for making it up. But she wouldn't, and she won't. And 'tis very ill-convenient, and I'm suffering a lot from it."

Barry had heard of the estrangement, and laughed without sympathy.

"Your mother told me you'd had a row. Well, whose fault was it? If you went out of your way to quarrel, Little Jack, that was asking for it. In an ordinary breeze there are faults on both sides. But if, as you say, you made trouble where there was none, then the fault's all your side and Jane's right to give you a rest."

"'Tis far from being a rest, I assure you."

"Perhaps she's found somebody else, and is glad of a good excuse to chuck you."

Jack's eyes grew round.

"That's a fearful thought," he said. "And now my state will be worse than before. I've kept a watch on her

so well as I could, though forbid to speak to her out of her own mouth; but I've never seen her along with any other man."

"Damn the women. Drop her. You bet your life she ain't worth troubling for."

"I dare say that's very good advice," admitted Little Jack drearily; "but there's some things you can't drop, because your nature won't let you do it. You might so well tell me to drop eating as drop Jane Bond. I crave for her cruel, and I shan't have another peaceful moment in this world, nor yet the next, if I'm denied her."

"Well, what can I do? If you can't win her back, I can't."

"I believe you could if you'd be so kind as to try—so clever as you are; and I'd be grateful to my dying day if you'd speak to her. She works for your aunt, so you could very easy do it and explain that there was no wickedness in me, and that—in a word—with your powers of speech, you'd get her round if any mortal man can do it. And I'd name you in my prayers, I'm sure."

"All right—I'll remember," promised Barry, and the other expressed his gratitude.

"If there be any other addicted to her, as you say, then very like 'tis past human skill," he admitted; "but if, as I hear from Miss Sarah Mortimer, she's a lot put about, too, then such a man as you might save us alive. And I'm at your command ever after if you can."

With this promise Little Jack went his way, and Worth, patting a red dog, that came stretching to him from the old barrel that was its kennel, entered Nun's Cross.

Elsewhere May Mortimer and Rebecca Pascoe walked homeward together. The mother of Anstice praised the entertainment, and feared that it had cost Charles much money.

"It did," said Rebecca. "I'm not telling secrets when I say that twenty pounds wouldn't more than cover it. There was five pounds' worth of wine alone, I believe. But my nephew wasn't the man to stint at such a moment, and though your husband's part by right, Charles knew he couldn't expect Mr. Mortimer to do it on that scale."

"He's helping, however. We had all the will, but money's very small with us, and we felt that our gift to

Anstice of fifty pounds was best, and more like to please Charles than anything."

"It did. It will be put by to goody for her."

"'Tis a great blessing, Rebecca, that you are in the home, for the young wife needs wisdom more'n most folk; and there you are, to help and hearten her."

"Loyal to both I shall always endeavour to be," said Miss Pascoe. "She's got a masterpiece of a man, and that's no fancy on my part, being his aunt and knowing his righteousness. Everybody knows it for that matter. She looked a thought pale and pinnikin to my eye to-day, and I dare say 'tis a bit of remorse, May, because, though I'm a great one for letting the past bury the past—there 'tis—she did a very wrong deed, and no doubt, before the Holy Table at the great moment, her fault rose before her. However, I shall never remind her of it."

"No need to. She's going to be a good niece to you."

"Let her raise up a man-child in the likeness of its father—that's all I ask," said Miss Pascoe. "Then all will be forgiven, and she'll have justified her existence in the place it's pleased God to call her to. I want to live to see Charles hand down his own pattern to the next generation, for there ain't enough men like him about, so far as I see 'em."

"More weddings in the air seemingly. My niece, Damaris Worth, have took Benjamin Halfyard, the shoesmith."

"So I hear. Charles says he's a very good man. By the same token, 'twas him that set my nephew and your husband on the track that fatal morning."

"So it was. But let all that go. We'll look forward, Rebecca. In my experience, 'tis about the only place you can look with any comfort."

"If you're good, yes," admitted Miss Pascoe; "but if you're bad, no. In fact, 'tis a test, if you come to think of it, how a person looks forward. You can only trust the future if you ain't got nothing to be sorry for in the past."

This great but doubtful sentiment reduced May to thought, and they proceeded silently for a time.

A few hundred yards behind them came James Worth and his Aunt Sarah. He gravitated to her by a sort of instinct on this dire day. With none else could he even

speak; but her sympathy he knew, and he made efforts now to talk. His thoughts inevitably ran on Anstice.

He spoke like a child and said anything that came into his mind. He tried to be cheerful.

"'Tis her good before everything that I must keep in my thoughts, Aunt Sarah. But 'tis hard to grasp it, because —I wore these clothes the day I waited for her at Plymouth, and Uncle Nathan came instead. I always see him now, getting out of the railway carriage, with his cheek swollen up by toothache. He was kind in a manner of speaking. He felt a bit of what it was to me. Looking back, I much wonder how I got over my shock and kept my intellect. Yet here I am."

"You've been very brave, James, and everybody admires it, I'm sure. And you've always got the satisfaction of knowing that you rose to a very great pitch. By taking the line you've took, and submitting to the course of affairs, you've showed your feeling for Anstice has rose to be a very proper thing in my opinion."

"He'll never love her like I did, and she'll never love him like she loved me. You can't feel what we felt twice in a lifetime."

"Leave them. He's a man of very nice habits and he loves her truly, and you can feel very safe that he'll do all he can to make her happy and content. He's large-minded, they say, and he certainly never harboured any unkind thoughts against you, even though he felt you were mistook. We must all go on with our lives and trust Providence, that sees the end from the beginning, James; and so you will, I know that."

"I hope he won't make her work very hard. She had a great wish in the old days to feel she would be able just to sit and think and do nothing for an hour at a time after she was married to me. And she should have."

"Yes, be sure he'll respect that. She's the very one for Strane Steps, because, with her gentle nature, she'll just slip into her place and won't interfere with Miss Pascoe, like some of the more bustling, pushing, younger generation might have done. She'll just be herself—gracious and kind—and I'm sure they'll spoil her, if anything."

"Nothing could spoil her, unless it was trying to make her different."

"They won't do that, James. And we are all here close to her. I know that is a great thought for Anstice, because she told me so. 'Tisn't as if she was being took away among stranger people. She's got her own round about her—her mother and father and me and your mother."

"I hate her mother worse than I thought I'd live to hate any human creature. God's my judge, Aunt Sarah, I hate her worse than I hate Pascoe."

"Don't you say that. It ain't in your character to hate anybody."

"Oh yes, it is. And the bitterness be to know that, even where I hate, I can do nought. And worse than that—even where I hate, so weak am I, that I fear I'll soon cease even to hate."

"And a good thing, too, my dear. Your hate will hurt none but yourself."

"Yes," he said. "I shall stop hating certain parties as sure as I go on living, and I'm ashamed of myself to think I shall."

She talked with him and then, as they reached the turning to Nun's Cross, David Mortimer's market-cart overtook them and stopped. For here alighted those he had brought back from Princetown with him, his brother and sister.

Mary and Nathan descended and thanked their brother for the lift.

"Most kind, I'm sure, David, and I'm greatly obliged," said Mrs. Worth.

But David made no response. He drove away, and Mary turned to her sister.

"He's eaten too much," she said. "He's like as if he was sleep-walking—not a word."

Nathan shook his head.

"Not drunky," he explained; "but 'twas the same at last Duchy Rent Dinner. He's like they sarpents, that take in enough at one meal to last a week."

They drifted down the hill talking of the wedding. James had walked on alone, and his mother was tearful about him. Sarah, however, explained that James had shown sparks of wisdom on the subject.

"He feels it a good bit, as such a tender man must," she said. "But he takes a pretty high-minded view, in and

out of his fits of impatience. 'Tis like a death for him, and we can only hope time will go fast with him, because nought else will be able to heal the poor dear."

"I've felt for him a great deal," confessed Nathan, "and nothing but my duty to my daughter has kept me up to the mark. 'Twas a very unfortunate mischance they ever got to fall in love, and it shows, if that wanted showing, that it's not a good thing for a family to live bunched up in each other's laps same as we do. I'm glad the younger generation will go afield, and Damaris will live to Princetown when she takes Halfyard. And I hope, when James or Barry find wives, that they'll pick 'em from long ways off and bring new elements into the family."

"James will never marry," said Mary. "It was Anstice or none for him. He'll not find another to look at life like he does. And as for Barry, he's getting more and more under the influence of his uncle. He'll be a woman-hater afore he's much older, and the race will die out, I shouldn't wonder."

"A thousand pities," declared Nathan. "We was very good stuff, even on the spindle side; but these things will be as they will. The wedding went very suent, and a lot there I didn't expect—our friends, I mean, not the Pascoe people."

"Everybody I spoke to was very pleased for us," said Sarah.

"I'm hoping for a feeling of dignity to appear in Anstice," continued Nathan. "She must hold her head a thought higher now."

"The violet don't hold up her head because she's took from the hedge and put in a garden," answered Mary. "She'll be herself, but, please God, not unhappy as time passes."

They parted presently, and his mother had speech with James. He came down from changing his clothes and, at her wish, drank a cup of tea with her. In thought he followed the wedded pair. It was unfortunate that he knew Bude and could set a background too painfully vivid to the new-made husband and wife. He saw them strolling beside the canal, visiting the churchyard with its old figure-heads from wrecked ships above drowned sailors'

graves, wandering upon the cliffs, watching the sun set over the far horizon of the sea. He pictured them tramping the sands when the tide was out and listening to the thunder of white-capped waves when the west wind blew.

Damaris came home to supper and brought Ben Halfyard with her. They were full of the wedding, and his sister, knowing well enough what hid in the heart of James, strove to make the conversation as cheerful as might be and dwelt upon the humours of the day. But nought availed. The stricken man craved for silence and loneliness. He went out at last and walked over the heath under the stars, nor did he return until he knew the women would have gone to bed.

Then he, too, retired, and in torment passed through the small hours of the night. He remembered a thing that his brother had said to him. It seemed a hundred years ago since Barry warned him, yet the very words came freshly, poignantly to his mind. "If you don't have your way, you'll never forgive yourself." That was what the other had said, and now James knew that the words were true. He would never forgive himself. No matter the arguments and the forces drawn against him, beneath all the talk and reason and wisdom of the victorious side there persisted in his heart the conviction that he was right; that he and Anstice had been created for each other, beyond every arid fact and rational objection that could be advanced against their union. But he had not had his way; he had gone down; he had yielded, after the feeblest fight, to the enemy. There remained for him nothing but lasting grief and futile remorse. He would never forgive himself while he lived. He hoped heartily that might not be long. He prayed that at least he would be spared to see Anstice content, interested in life, and not under the hand of misery as he must ever be. Only she, still, would have any power to bring colour into the wan and wintry thing that must henceforth be his existence; only if she came out of their sorrow with some future interest and zest for life could he ever bear to live.

He reflected on the possibilities, and so, as his mind weakened under weariness and his body tossed sleepless, he abandoned the subtler trains of thought and those that reached into the future, and fell back morbidly into the

agony of the moment. He told himself that it was base and vile to think of Anstice now save behind a general mist, with detail eliminated therefrom ; but his mind took a hideous delight in tearing the mist away and revealing her on her wedding night in another man's arms. He knew her so well, and her shuddering and tortures made him mad.

That night, and others like it, sank gradually into the limbo of the past, as all horrible memories and extreme griefs when time has deadened the pang of them. But he never forgot. To the end of his days the ghastly recollection would silence him, chill his spirit and cloud his mood.

Because no human temperament lies more open to sorrow, more undefended from grief, than that wherein power of feeling reigns paramount and the will to act persists for ever paralysed.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SENTIMENTALISTS

Life proceeded on its way with James and Anstice and the husband of Anstice.

Charles returned cheerful from Bude, and his wife appeared to be happy in the eyes of her father and mother, when they met her again.

Anstice spoke of the sands and the sea and a great storm that she had witnessed. A little collier from Wales was wrecked off Bude at noon upon the day of this sudden gale. The lifeboat could not reach her, but when she had driven upon the rocks, the man and his son, who formed the crew, were saved by the rocket apparatus. Upon these things the bride dwelt, and upon the graves of drowned men in the churchyard; but she said nothing about Charles save that he was a kind man.

And he returned as placid as he went and declared himself glad to come back to business. To the dwellers at White Works it seemed that his attitude to his wife was that of a man who had been married for years.

They made no inquiries of either party, since neither was prepared to volunteer information. But their reticence appeared to cover nothing painful. It was David Mortimer who penetrated beneath it and, indifferent to any delicacy, asked a blunt question.

It happened that Charles, driving into Princetown, met the old man on foot and offered him a lift. David accepted and mounted. He detested Pascoe, but the master of Strane Steps was not aware of the fact. They spoke on the subject of sales and prices; then Mortimer made an inquiry.

"And how d'you get on with your young wife?" he asked.

Charles smiled, and answered in a voice rather patronising.

" I'm not the man, I hope, to have married anybody I shouldn't get on with, Mr. Mortimer."

" Yes, you are—just the man ; because you've lived in cotton-wool all your life and don't know reality. You've stuffed your ears up with religion, which comes out of your mouth ; and you think you owe all your luck to being pious. But you don't. Luck is a matter of chance."

" Happiness in married life isn't a matter of chance at my age. It depends on judgment and precaution and calculation. Falling in love, as I did, with a woman a good bit younger than myself, I had to look all round it and balance one thing with another. It doesn't always work to edification, and an elderly man married to a young woman sometimes lives to be sorry. Then they get to think the marriage state a bit overrated and set others against it."

" 'Tis only overrated in the minds of fools. You can't underrate it."

" At any rate, knowing myself and knowing Anstice, I felt that I might safely trust the future. Anstice is the weaker vessel, and it will be my privilege to strengthen her character and widen her mental outlook. The mind is there, but it has never been exercised so far as I can see. She will be a valuable woman in time."

" No woman's valuable—along of vanity. If they think they are valuable, they soon get above themselves and cease to be so."

" Anstice is not vain."

" Never was a pretty woman that weren't. They're doomed from the start, and vanity's their undoing, because, sooner or later, the food of praise is withheld from 'em and then they sink and starve. They live on praise. No woman ever knows when her beauty be gone, and they mope like owls when it's driven home to 'em. They live on praise, I tell you, and if 'tis withheld they soon lose everything. In fact, such slight naughts they be that their very self-respect, depends upon how we rate 'em. Nothing makes 'em more reckless and despairing than to find we've got no use for 'em. Scorn a man, and he keeps his nerve and cares not ; but treat a woman so and she's down and out."

" Some may depend on our admiration—certainly not

all. Some don't like us any more than you like them. You're a very bitter man to the female sex, Mr. Mortimer."

"I view 'em with the naked eye, and if I'm bitter, that's only to say truth's bitter. I look at 'em from outside and keep the bars between—that's all. They shall lay me out when I'm dead—not sooner."

"If everybody felt like that, the world would stop."

"It will," prophesied David. "A time is coming when the feeling against 'em will rise to such a pitch that the human race will be a goner. That's how nature will wipe it out, in my opinion. The young men begin to see through the women. There ain't the courting there was."

"I haven't noticed any falling away."

"'Tis so, whatever you haven't noticed. Take my nephew, Barry Worth: he sees what they are. You won't catch him after a girl. James was the other sort; but once bit, twice shy—even he won't try again. How's he going on? You're more like to know than me."

"There's a great deal to admire in James," declared Mr. Pascoe. "Barry I don't know much about, and he's too young to be companionable to me; but James is old for his years. He has a kind heart and, like Anstice, I feel his mind is quite capable of being enlarged. The brain exists, but it's fallow, if you understand me."

"Him and his cousin will go to school to you—eh?"

"James is welcome. With a man like that one has no suspicion. My aunt likes him, too. At first she felt a little doubtful of Anstice, for there was an inclination on the part of my wife to keep too much in the background. But this would have been bad for her character. She must learn to feel the responsibility and the power that go with the married state."

David laughed as he prepared to alight at the forge.

"You're a funny-minded creature," he said, "and you talk rummage to my ear; but you're simpler than I thought you was. And mind this; don't you trust too far—her, or her cousin either. Once a woman, always a woman. You won't larn any female to look at life as you do, because they can't. Their eyes be shaped different from ours; they may see the same things, but the things look different from what they do to us."

"There's a darkness of vision in youth, as you say,"

answered Charles, " but it's not peculiar to women ; and if I'm funny-minded to you, Mr. Mortimer, you are very narrow-minded to me. And if you were simpler, probably you'd be wiser. Christians trust one another and——"

" Go your way—go your way ! " answered the other. " Fegs ! If 'tis your honest opinion that Christians trust one another, then you didn't ought to be at large no more, Pascoe. I'd lock 'e up on that, with all the other zanies ! "

They parted, and Charles, shocked at such sentiments, pursued his business.

It was true that Anstice often saw James, as she often saw her other relations, nor did Charles raise any objection. He was not a man who had ever experienced passion himself, nor did he, or anybody, associate such an emotion with James Worth. Pascoe had always felt the word ' rival ' too great for the situation, and, since his marriage, he had ceased to think of James save as a kinsman of his wife. He actually found himself liking the young man on better acquaintance. James proved a good listener. Neither Charles nor his aunt perceived that it was the presence of Anstice, rather than the wisdom of her husband, that brought the lonely young man to Strane Steps ; but it was an immense comfort both to him and Anstice to find her old lover not unwelcome. They both appreciated the privilege, and James, in his simple way, was grateful for such consideration.

He confessed fearfully to Anstice, on an occasion of returning with her from Princetown, that he still loved her, and she declared he was not to be blamed, since he could not help so doing. She, too, loved him.

" Charles used to talk about loving on a high plane," said Anstice, " and now you and me do ; and we always shall—even after you're married, too."

But that he swore could never be. She had few secrets from him, and discussed her new life and its experiences. She praised her husband for his goodness and patience ; she had nothing but gratitude for Aunt Rebecca, who forgave her the past on better acquaintance, and was kind, considerate and fertile in valuable hints and suggestions ; but Anstice confessed herself as very far from happy, and while proclaiming content in all other ears, never pretended it with James.

They made a grave mistake and went for a long walk one Sunday afternoon, when Charles had gone to Tavistock for a few days and Anstice found herself free. The occasion was sunless and cold, with a hint of snow in the air. But the moor was dry, and they wandered through Fox Tor Mire, over sad, dead grasses and under a grey sky, through which the place of the low sun was marked by gentle brightness on the clouds.

They descended to Childe's Tomb, an ancient memorial in the waste, where tradition told that a hunter of old time had been overtaken by tempest and perished with his steed. A modern cross had taken the place of the original stone, destroyed before the monuments of the moor were cherished; and here, upon steps that supported the sacred symbol, they sat together in the sobriety of the great heath, with no sound but the streamlet at hand and the sighing of the wind in the rushes.

They had talked as they came, but now for a while they were silent. Then James produced a little box of chocolates, which he had bought at his shop the day before, and made Anstice eat them. She thanked him gratefully, took two, and put the rest in her pocket.

"I've got every little treasure you've given me from time to time, all safe locked up," she told him. "You wouldn't think there was any harm in that, would you?"

"How could there be?"

"We know there isn't, but Charles—sometimes I think as I ought to tell him."

"Then tell him, if it's on your mind."

"I wouldn't say it was on my mind. But I like to look at them sometimes and put on the silver bracelet."

"Why not?"

She was silent for a while scratching the sand at their feet with the point of her umbrella. Then she spoke again.

"I vexed him more than usual the day before he went away."

"Never, Anstice?"

"I did—I do vex him sometimes, and generally he tells me where I'm wrong; but I didn't know it this time, and he didn't show I had. Aunt Rebecca told me afterwards. She said I was too lifeless at parting from him, and ought to have offered to go as far as the station with him. Of

course, I would have if I'd thought he wanted me to. But I do feel lifeless sometimes, not from any wrong feeling, you understand. A weight comes down on me now and again, and I often know I'm not saying just the right thing, but don't know what I ought to have said instead. I know that they are working away at me, and being terrible cheerful and patient about it; but I don't catch their meaning always, though I don't give them anything to quarrel about."

"I should think you didn't."

"He's good—I can hardly believe such a good man ever lived before; but sometimes I catch him a thought less Christian-like—not with me, but other people. He'll even flash out sometimes, and I've got a wicked feeling that I wouldn't mind if he flashed oftener—at me, too. The funny thing is that life, that seemed to fly so quick before I was married, properly stands still now. I feel as if I'd been wedded to him for years and years, and yet 'tis not quite three months."

"Same with me," said James. "I feel as if you had."

"We never laugh," explained she. "That's a curious thing. Mother never laughed much at home, but father did, and I did; but Aunt Rebecca isn't a laugher, and Charles don't, though he smiles. It's a small matter, and I dare say, if I was to laugh, it would make them. Yet I never feel like laughing, though things happen that ought to make me."

"We ain't a laughing breed, I reckon. Damaris is cheerful enough, and Barry used to be; but he's different from what he was. He's took to despising me, I fancy—never forgave me for—well, that's a thing of the past. Let's be walking now. You'll get cold."

They proceeded to the ruins of Fox Tor Farm, and sat down once more where a wall sheltered them from the north.

"I often look across here and think of the time we brought grannie over on her birthday," said Anstice.

"So do I," he said. "She was a nice old dear, and good to us children."

"I'll tell you something interesting, Jimmy," she said suddenly. "You oughtn't to be the first to know it, but, somehow, when I found it out, I thought of you, and

I'll tell you. Only you mustn't tell anybody else, and pretend 'tis news when you hear it."

"So I will, then."

"Somehow I'm terrible interested to hear what you'll think. I shall tell Charles next time I vex him, because then he'll forgive me in a moment."

"Whatever can it be, then?"

"I'm going to have a baby."

"Oh, my!"

He stared at her and blushed.

"How wonderful! I hope to God he'll take proper care of you."

"Trust him for that. 'Tis that I'm afraid of. He's very wishful indeed for a son, and I'm in a twitter already 'twill be a little girl."

"Boy or girl, 'twill be a bit of heaven for the man."

"You won't breathe a word, Jimmy?"

"Not me. Be of good cheer about it, Anstice."

"Yes, I will. But I can't help thinking what might have been. I will think as I choose. Nobody shall ever take my thoughts away from me."

"I know how you feel. Thoughts are all we've got now. And sometimes I wish to God I couldn't think; and then, again, other times I'd fight the world for my thoughts, though I often stop thinking and drop asleep less happy than when I went to bed."

"So do I."

They examined their ideas, and found, as usual, that one echoed the other. They set out again presently by Swincombe river, climbed up to Great Sherberton Farm, crossed Dart and came out upon the main road.

"'Twill be too far for you to walk, I'm fearing," said James.

"Our walks always seem too short for me."

"How is it to be at Christmas? Will you join the usual Christmas party at your father's?"

"No. I asked for it; but Charles said that wouldn't be vitty. I shall see you all, though."

"I've got my Christmas present for you a'ready."

"Oh, James! And what shall I get you, I wonder?"

"Nothing at all. It will be enough if I have a sight of you. I shall hate the day if you ain't coming."

"I wonder if you could drop in and have tea with us? Charles likes you—so does Aunt Rebecca."

"No," he said; "but I think it might be a reasonable thing if you were to come—not to dinner, of course, but to tea. They couldn't mind that. Charles might come, too. If I can screw up courage, I'll ask him. He can but say 'No.'"

"You mustn't ask him. I'll ask father."

"Do—it's a little thing."

The west brightened with fleeting waves of rosy cloud as they passed the lodge of Prince Hall; then light quickly died, and in the dusk, nigh Two Bridges, they saw the figures of a man and a woman glide out from the trees of the neighbouring glen. The second pair, walking briskly, overtook them, and were about to pass.

Thereupon they recognised each other, and one of the four was perturbed.

Barry Worth, with Marian Dennis, had run unexpectedly upon his brother; and now, to hide his own private confusion, Barry rated James.

"This won't do," he said. "If they catch you wandering about after dark with Anstice, Jimmy, you'll get into trouble."

"And why shouldn't I?" asked James. "That seems to me a thing you oughtn't to say, Barry."

"People might read a wrong meaning into it, James."

The elder was annoyed.

"How can such a young man as you be so full of hateful wisdom?" he asked. "'Tis bad enough when the old are suspicious and evil-minded; but 'tis vile when the young are. Don't you know me?"

"Too well," answered Barry. "That's why I warn you. I know you couldn't do any harm to a fly, let alone another man's wife, and still less to Anstice, of all parties; but even you ain't so innocent as all that. You've got to remember that people judge from experience. They don't know that you and Anstice are angels all but wings, and they'd very likely think—well, I shouldn't go messing about together, especially when Charles Pascoe is away from home."

James did not answer. To him the suggestion came as a very painful novelty; but Anstice was amused.

"What do you think about it, Marian?" she asked. "If a bachelor can walk with a maiden, why for shouldn't he walk with a married woman—and my cousin and all?"

"I think as we'd better change the subject and mind our own business," answered Miss Dennis; "and I also think you two had best to promise you'll say nought about meeting me and Barry together. He's only dressed you down, James, to make you forget him."

Barry laughed.

"Sees through me, you see. And she's right, as usual. I'll ask you two not to mention this meeting. If Uncle David heard that I'd had a stroll with a girl he'd fire me out, very like."

They promised to say nothing, and, at Princetown, Marian invited James and Anstice to join her at tea.

"We're going to my mother's," she said.

"I'd be proper thankful for a cup," declared Anstice, "and I'm leery,* too, because, my husband being away, we didn't trouble about dinner much. Aunt Rebecca cares nothing for food, unless 'tis for Charles."

Mrs. Dennis exhibited surprise at the arrival of four to the evening meal, and that others of the family should have met Barry and her daughter rendered her uneasy. For the engagement was kept a jealous secret. Barry, however, explained the chance meeting and the promise of silence exacted.

"And if Jimmy, here, squeaks, I shall tell 'Gentleman' Pascoe about his walk with his wife," explained the younger.

They ate and drank, and both James and Anstice grew excited and interested in the particulars of Barry's romance. Again and again they swore secrecy; but James, none the less, advised against it.

"Be open and above board," he urged. "It never pays, in the long run, to have secrets, or make people think mistakenly about you. If I don't know that, who should? Tell Uncle David you're engaged to Miss Dennis, and take the consequences. If you don't, a time will come when you'll get a bad conscience and find yourself terrible unhappy."

* *Leery* = hungry.

Marian heartily supported James, and Barry was amused.

"You judge others by yourself," he said. "I'm made of tougher stuff than that. When I have a bad conscience, it comes if I find I've made a fool of myself, not sooner. I can very easily forgive myself for hoodwinking Uncle David, knowing that he's got a bee in his bonnet against the women. I think the world of him, and I'm doing him no harm by keeping shut about Marian, because business is business, and we must look forward. It would be a fool's trick to give the show away, especially as I'm going pretty strong with the old man just now. 'Tisn't humbug, either. He's got sense enough for fifty men."

"He's getting you round to his hard way of thinking a great deal too fast," murmured James. "You can't live with a terrible man like him and not be influenced."

"That's what I think," declared Marian. "I tell Barry that, some fine day, he'll get to hate the girls, too, and then where shall I be?"

"No need to fear that. I'm only biding my time. He thinks a lot of me, though he tries to hide it. But in another six months, or thereabouts, I'm going to start on him cautious. Meantime I beg all concerned to mind their tongues."

"It's safe enough with me and James, I'm sure, and nobody will wish you happiness more than us," said his cousin.

"Wishing happiness don't bring it, however. Now you'd best be going home, if you take my advice, Anstice, else Pascoe's aunt will wonder what the devil's become of you."

Presently they left Marian at 'The Plume of Feathers,' and set off together; and Barry's worldly wisdom proved justified, for it was the last long walk that James ever enjoyed with his old sweetheart.

No sign of storm greeted Anstice on her return to Strane Steps; but a storm brewed, none the less, from the hour of her return.

CHAPTER XVIII

CHARLES SPEAKS

Rebecca Pascoe listened to the account of her niece's expedition and said nothing, but told Charles upon his return. It was their custom to keep a sort of benevolent espionage on Anstice—for her good. When she surprised them they compared notes, and, from a kindly interpretation of her simple deeds and speeches, at last inspired each other to an attitude less amiable.

"God forbid I should read anything into it," said Miss Pascoe, "for never was a bird on a bough more innocent than your wife, I hope and believe. Her eyes are as simple as a pool of water. But—there it is—a ten-mile walk she took with her cousin, and not back till after dark, and tea at New London along with Mrs. Dennis. I went so far myself as to say it wasn't what you might call respectful to you, which surprised her."

"That was strong, however. I'm afraid you put thoughts into her head if you said that," answered Charles.

"I wanted to. I wasn't vexed with her; but I was vexed with James Worth, because he's a man and, simple as he may be, knows what life is. He's been in the world thirty years, and so he must know, if he's not wrong in his intellects."

"I shall talk to Anstice," said Pascoe; and he did so at the first opportunity.

"It's a very unfortunate thing," he declared, "that evil must come into the world, and the knowledge of it has got to be put into clean hearts for their protection. If I was a schoolmaster, Anstice, I should very much hate having to read out the sins of dead and gone celebrities to young, innocent minds. But history is largely made up of the wrong-doing of the human race, as you saw in Josephus, and every child that comes into the world has got to be taught what a very dangerous place the world is. We've got to train the young foot for the narrow road,

and you can only do that by telling about the dangers lurking to right and left. And so I tell you that, when a husband is away from a wife, the good wife takes a bit of extra care to mind her going."

"If she's good, it's all one whether her husband is home or not," said Anstice.

"True; but goodness has to hold its light high. There's always plenty to blow it out. However, that's an allegory, as they say, and I want to make my meaning clear. I'll ask you not to go for any more walks with James. It's unusual, and though I don't mind, plenty of husbands would."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because of human nature. Human nature moves on a pretty regular pattern, and those that think they are above it often find they are not. Human nature is always lying in wait for the young, to catch 'em. James loved you, and you loved him. Well, you'd say as soon as wisdom showed you both it wouldn't do, your love died out; and I believe that, because I'm sure you get to love me more and more, Anstice, as our lives go on. And James is a good Christian, too, I should say; and, of course, he stopped loving you at once, as in duty and honour bound. And, knowing where we all stand, though we're friends with everybody, there's no particular reason why you should go out walking with James—especially after dark."

"There's no reason for a lot of things—no reason for and no reason against, Charles."

"That's your rather ignorant point of view, my dear. Things that matter so little there's no reason for, or against, needn't occupy sensible minds. They're beneath the notice, in fact. But in this case there is a reason against."

"What reason?"

"I'm telling you. The world remembers the past and the world also knows a farmer's wife is a busy woman, or ought to be. And people, seeing you mooning on the high road with James, would wonder you wasn't better employed—especially when the head of the house happened to be away."

"What you think matters; what people think in general doesn't, Charles dear. You know that it's

pleasure to me to have a talk with Jimmy sometimes, because we think so much alike."

"I don't want you to think like him, however. I want to find that you're beginning to think like me."

"I do try."

"And must in this. What I think does matter, as you say. In fact, it's got to matter. And what I wish matters equally as much. So you'll not walk out with him again, please."

She was silent a moment; then began to argue against the prohibition.

"You're denying me a little thing I care about, Charles; and he'll be terribly hurt, because he'll think you don't like him. And——"

"I'm sorry you can't agree instantly, but I insist."

"I do agree, of course—you can't say I don't agree. Only I'm sorry."

"You'll live to be glad."

"Supposing——" she began. But he stopped her with a little asperity.

"No more. It's rather a shock to me that you can't see it. I'll put that down to your nice mind. Still it's a shock. I thought you would have understood in a moment. That you don't shows——. Read more of my good books—enlarge your mind, listen to your aunt, I've spoken."

"Very well, dear Charles. It shall be just as you wish."

He often disliked a certain unconscious humility of tone in Anstice, yet he also still more disliked any difference of opinion expressed by her. The illogical male always wants it both ways with women, and even demands this as a right from his wife. Now, as her mild defence had irritated him, so did her martyred voice when she surrendered.

"And don't go about saying I'm a tyrant, or anything of that, please, Anstice."

"Of course not. You're quite right, I dare say."

"I wish you were sure," he said; "it's a trouble to me sometimes that I've got to be sure for both of us. You are too vague about right and wrong sometimes. A man wants a right hand in his wife. He even wants to come to

her to help make up his mind now and again—that's what a real helpmate should do—like your mother does."

Anstice laughed to hear him say so.

"Fancy little me helping to make up your mind! You should have married somebody a lot wiser and older than me if you wanted anybody like that, I expect."

He stared, and the simple speech probed him and shook him. He knew it was artless and uttered without a shadow of significance, yet the very simplicity of the speaker lent it a barb. He turned and went away without making an answer. But the incident did not escape his mind. He was unusually silent for twenty-four hours afterwards; then he visited Princetown and had some talk with another woman—one he had known and respected for many years.

He called at the general stores, where James served, and timed his visit so that he might return with James when the shop closed. But it happened that the younger man was not for the moment visible, and Charles enjoyed conversation with Sophia Edwards. The day's work was done and the shutters were just being put up. Sophia, a pale, strong, not unhandsome woman of two-and-thirty, was engaged with a ledger. She dropped her pencil, however, and extended a hand to Mr. Pascoe. They were on terms of long friendship.

"And how are you?" he said. "Desperate busy, no doubt, with Christmas so near."

"Busy enough, Charles."

"But don't you do more than your share, Sophia. A willing horse, you know."

"I never think about my share. The books are my share. Father's glad to leave them to me."

"And well he may be. Lucky the man who's got you for book-keeper. And luckier still the man who'll have you for his better half some day. When shall we hear about him, I wonder?"

She shook her head.

"I'm happier where I am, I reckon. Born to be an old maid—so my father says."

"Never! That's his selfishness, I'm afraid. I'll live to rejoice at your wedding, no doubt."

The talk generally ran on this line between them, and

she often wondered in secret why he had passed her over for the little, shadowy beauty who was his wife. To Sophia, indeed, and many others, Anstice did appear a shadow—a girl of hardly more account than a pretty flower in a garden.

"Why do you want to see me wedded, I wonder?" she asked. "Because you find it such a great success, I expect, and think the whole world would be as lucky as yourself?"

"Perhaps you're right. But no—marriage never does or can look the same from the man and woman's point of view. I see that clearly enough. For why? The difference between them is too deep. They come to it with different machinery, and you women can't feel or see all it means for a male, any more than the male can understand all it means exactly for the female."

"I suppose not."

"And I may say more. I may say that the wider the gap in age between the pair, then the wider the difference in the angle of sight. That, of course, is natural."

Miss Edwards was interested, but felt this to be delicate ground. In the arcanum of her heart she had resented the fact that Pascoe, so admirably suited to her in every way, had not loved her; for there was a time when, in her opinion, he had flattered hope and shown a measure of interest which justified tender thoughts, if no more. She was quick now to read his last assertion, as founded on personal knowledge perhaps not wholly pleasant. She longed to hear more, but could not ask for particulars.

"'Tis so," she answered. "Years make a barrier between man and man and woman and woman, so, no doubt, between husband and wife they might. But, no doubt, perfect love casteth out fear."

"Perfect love casteth out a great deal besides fear," declared Charles. "It is a tower of strength; but it's rather a rare event. In fact, perfect love, Sophia, is about as far to seek as any other perfect thing."

"Then you're so much the luckier, I'm sure, to have got it."

He showed his teeth in his large smile, that lighted the whole of his face.

" Thank you for that word. It is a great thing to have understanding friends."

" And nobody wants friends more than married people, they say."

" They say what's very true. I don't mean a man should have his friends and a wife should have hers—that's no good; but, if they can combine and find real, trusty friends attached to both sides, then it's a great source of strength. I want for Anstice to have more women friends. She's never had any to speak of—so I find—and they would enlarge her mind and make her wiser with woman's wisdom, which is the only thing she lacks, I believe."

" Too young to be very wise yet."

" Not too young to be well on the road to wisdom. You see her now and again, Sophia, and give her the benefit of your understanding. I'd feel under a very great obligation to you if you was to do that."

James appeared at this moment, and together they set off for home.

Miss Edwards had not answered Charles, and, as he prepared to depart, he spoke again.

" I've got a little memento of Christmas for you," he said, " and I hope you'll accept it."

" Very kind, I'm sure."

" The pleasure is mine."

But his geniality evaporated somewhat in the open air, beside James.

" The very man I wanted to see," began the latter. " I'm most wishful—we all are—for Anstice to come to tea o' Christmas day. Just tea, so as the family party at her father's should be complete, as usual. I much hope you'll see your way to that, Charles."

" I wanted to speak to you, too. And I'll speak first, if you please. Then I'll answer your question about my wife. I must tell you, frankly and openly, James, that I'm not too pleased with you. I don't ask for much, because, outside your business, which you perform faithfully, no doubt, you're not a very able man, and you haven't thought as much as you ought to have thought about serious things."

" I'm afraid that's true. But you can't quarrel with

the brains in a man's head, Charles. I didn't choose my pattern of mind."

"No, you didn't; but we should all do the best with the material we've got; and you do not. It's utterly impossible for any grown man to be so simple as you appear to be, James. You know a certain amount about life and propriety, and if you are not jealous for your own good name——"

"I am."

"Then so much the more ought you to be jealous for the good name of other people."

"And when wasn't I, Charles?"

"So recently as a week ago. You ought not to have walked out with Anstice on Sunday and kept her away from home after dark. And you knew it: you have got brains enough to know perfectly well it wasn't right."

"I swear I never thought it wasn't right. I never dreamed that you'd object—my Bible oath, I didn't!"

"Then I must believe you, though it's suspiciously simple—as simple as Anstice herself. I pardoned her, knowing what she is. And I'll pardon you also; but only on condition that, now I've told you it's wrong, you'll believe it's wrong, and never do it again."

"What's wrong? I know right from wrong as well as anybody, Charles. There was no wrong—not a shadow."

"We must avoid the appearance of evil, James."

"Evil! How could there be evil where Anstice was? Haven't you found out that evil can't live near her?"

"Evil lives near all of us, unfortunately. Where there are human beings there is evil at their elbow, James. It's an evil world, and people are quite as quick to think evil as to do it—in fact quicker, because it's easier. To conquer the doing of evil is comparatively simple, if you want to, and ask for help from the proper place; but you have to go a long way on the narrow road, James, before you conquer the thinking of evil."

"I didn't think evil, Charles. God's my judge that, nowadays, I don't think evil of anybody."

"I hope not; I hope not. But that is not nearly enough. You must not give other people the opportunity to think evil—either of you yourself, or anybody else."

Profound indignation burned in the heart of James at this caution. To him the conventional sentiments of Mr. Pascoe struck as an outrage. He was not pretending pain, but honestly felt himself injured before such moderate admonishment.

"I'm sure the world's not such a wicked place as you believe," he said, after a silence.

"I wish I thought you were in a position to correct me, James; but there is such a thing as the daily newspaper, and, if you was to look into it from time to time and read the police news in an open spirit, I'm afraid you'd find you were mistaken. I'm a charitable man, as we're taught to be, and charity covers a multitude of sins; but it don't cover the fact that there's a great deal of evil beyond charity's power to cover and beyond morals to pass over."

"I should have thought that your charity could reach——"

"It isn't my charity; it's the world's opinion founded on ugly experience. The world judges by experience, not having anything else to judge by, and if I must speak plain, since you appear to be so thick-headed, then the plain English is that a married woman can't go dancing about after dark with anybody but her husband; and, if she does so, the world will put a bad meaning to it."

"Nobody that knew me would, Charles."

"Why not? It's just because they did know you and the past that ordinary people would be the first to read evil into such a thing. But first there's me to be considered, I should think, and, if you don't see that, then really, James, you're a bigger fool than you ought to be with all the advantages you have had from my company of late."

"I certainly don't see it; but, of course, your will is law."

"I should hope so."

"But there's no objection to her coming to tea at her father's on Christmas day, is there?"

"I don't wish it—that's objection enough. I've already told her father that on that sacred anniversary my wife will stop in the bosom of her family."

"Everybody's going to be cruel disappointed, then."

"No, they are not. It was only her father and you who

suggested it. Probably, if I hadn't heard what I did hear on returning home, I might have raised no objection ; but, thanks to your foolishness, I've decided that it must not be."

"My foolishness is paid for, then."

"Foolishness is always paid for, James."

Pascoe improved the occasion to preach at some length, and the other listened in silent indignation. Resentment fluttered his spirit, and he was very downcast and disappointed.

He related this experience to his mother on returning home, and won no comfort from her.

"You've got to learn such a lot, James," she said. "Didn't I tell you all this long ago ? Now I do hope you'll see ; and it's not a bit of use for you to fancy that the world's a better or a kinder-hearted place than people say it is. It ain't, my dear, and the world never pricks up its ears quicker than where a man and another man's wife are concerned."

CHAPTER XIX

CHRISTMAS DAY

It was the custom of his family that all should meet on Christmas day and partake of the Christmas dinner with Nathan Mortimer. The head of the clan never attempted any amenities, and laughed at his brother for so doing; but David always accepted his invitation, and for many years the father of Anstice had entertained his relations upon this anniversary. Now only his daughter was absent, and he explained to his sisters, Mary Worth and Sarah Mortimer, that he had suggested her company, if only at tea, but that her husband was unprepared to fall in with the suggestion.

"More is in it than goes to the eye," said May Mortimer to Mrs. Worth, "and there's no doubt James done a very improper thing walking out with Anstice when Charles was away. 'Tis that has put up the man's back, as well it might; and now we've all got to suffer."

But Mary did not like her sister-in-law, and never had liked her.

"Not all," she said. "You won't, for one. No need to pretend to me. I know very well what your daughter is to you, May—and always was."

Sarah poured oil on the waters.

"You mustn't mind Mary, May. It's only human for her to feel for her son. And, of course, understanding James, you can't expect us to attach much importance to what Mr. Pascoe says about him. In fact, it's nonsense."

They argued thus because the error of James was now generally known.

Indeed, elsewhere, while the men walked in Nathan's farmyard and waited for dinner, Barry chaffed James, much to the latter's discomfort.

"What's this, then? The secret's out, I hear. But don't think I told it. Anyway, you've worried 'Gentle-

man ' Pascoe, it seems. That's to the good. Keep it up, Jimmy. It's your turn now. Give him hell—same as he gave you."

James protested.

" For God's sake, don't say things like that. It's very wrong."

" Well, since he's given you the tip and shown you where you can score off him, you take it. It's the most human thing I've heard about him, that he can be jealous. I'd enjoy playing your cards something tremendous."

James implored him to be silent, but he chaffed on.

" Uncle David says that a man had best to be good if he can, and, if he can't, then he must put all his wits into being clever. The trouble of wickedness, he says, is the amount of hard work and watchfulness it wants to make it a success. So, if you're going to be wicked, James—and I'm sure I hope you are——"

But his brother would suffer no more. He trembled with emotion.

" If you say another word, I'll let out your secret, Barry—I will, so sure as life ! You're speaking horrible things, and I won't have it, I tell you."

But Barry was not alarmed. He looked where David and Nathan walked together, and laughed.

" I know you too well. You won't give me and Marian away. You owe me too much."

Elsewhere, David walked with his brother, in a mood unusually mild.

" Farmer White has asked Baseombe and his wife over to Christmas dinner," he said, " so not a farthing's spending at Nun's Cross. Not a blink of fire—nothing. I always like to feel that Christmas, though it takes good money out of every other pocket, never draws none out of mine."

" On the contrary, you gain by it, because you take and don't give, that being your custom," said Nathan.

" And what's to prevent you doing the same ? Nothing but silly habit. I come, you'll say, and eat and drink with the others. I do, because I never refuse anything—never ; and, since you like to be foolish and give, that's no reason why I should be foolish and refuse."

" Well, it's my pleasure to have the family round me

at the festive season and spend a little upon 'em. It wouldn't be a pleasure to you, so you don't do it. But it takes all sorts to make a world."

Benjamin Halfyard appeared at this moment, and offered Nathan the greetings of the day. With him was Damaris Worth.

"What's he doing here?" asked David. "You ain't going outside the family, surely?"

"He won't be outside long. Mary feels that, because a girl changes her name, she mustn't think she's dropped out of the family; and so do I. And I much wanted Anstiee to-day; but her husband showed a little feeling, and turned me down. After all, he's right. Her place is at his table now. Damaris is going to marry Ben Halfyard. You was to be told to-day."

This fact interested David, for, though he often quarrelled with the blacksmith, he had entertained respect for him until now.

"That man going to take a woman?"

"It's to come out to-day. Halfyard doesn't know you're so bitter against the females, and I hope you'll say nothing to spoil the feast, or the news."

"I shall not. A feast is a feast, and you ought to keep your mind on the victuals, if they're worth it. They'll go their own road, and his horseshoes will suffer, no doubt."

They began the business of dinner presently and solemnly ate their way through a heavy meal. Two geese were the feature of the entertainment, and David, who preserved an amiable spirit to the astonishment of his family, declared the birds more tender than those at the recent Duchy Audit Dinner.

"The feed to the tenants was short of the mark this year, and the birds tough as old boots. Bought cheap, no doubt."

"You got on your legs, I hear, David," said Sarah Mortimer.

"I did, and rapped out a few words that made the steward's eyes bulge. Then the fools took hold of my coat-tails and pulled me down. A cowardly crew be the tenants."

"You couldn't very well be suffered to blackguard

Duchy while you had its food in your mouth," argued Nathan. "That's what French and Sanders and me felt."

"And why not? Why for should truth be choked because the food was free? They profess to want to hear us and serve us; yet, when I rose up primed to give 'em the law and the prophets about the rules of Dartmoor, the slaves pull me down."

"They'll never ask you again, Uncle David," said Barry; but David denied it.

"What do you know, you fool? They daren't leave me out if I pay my rent with the rest. 'Twould show they was frightened of me. They may be, but they won't show it. If t'others would only all band along with me—but 'tis vain to ax 'em. Sheep, that's what they are—men to look at, but only made of putty and pasteboard. Not one among 'em to read up the Law of the Commons, like me, and face Duchy with it."

"A plum-cake ain't all plums," said Barry. "The lump and staple's dough. We can't all be like you, uncle."

"'Twould be a world indeed if all men was like me," admitted David. "If the British nation was made up on my pattern, we'd damn soon conquer the rest of the earth and the fat of it."

"Have some more goose," said Mrs. Mortimer, and he consented.

"If you ask me, I'll take it," he said, and turned to Miss Mortimer. "Where's my new pair o' night socks, Sarah? This is the day for 'em."

"They're a thought behind time, I fear. But they'll be finished next week."

Then Nathan announced the open secret of his niece's engagement, and the good health of Damaris and Benjamin was drunk.

"'Tis all marrying and giving in marriage seemingly," said Sarah Mortimer.

"You and me are the only sensible ones," answered David, "and as to Halfyard here, though I've plucked a crow with him now and again, yet I always did reckon him a sharp man till this fatal news."

Damaris, asked by Nathan when she thought to be married, made reply:

" Benjamin wants it to be ever so soon ; but I'm going to hold out for Easter."

" We'll see," said her lover. " If you ax me, I think it may be a bit sooner."

Barry applauded this intention and offered to be best man, but Halfyard declined.

" Must go outside the family for that. 'Twas never heard the bride's brother was best man, I believe."

They consulted memory for examples of such an event ; and then came the pudding, to which David also did ample justiee.

The old man consented to a drop of brandy presently.

" 'Twill stick the pudden to my ribs," he said.

They drifted into the parlour when the meal was done, and while the younger people ate nuts and oranges and Halfyard produced a box of crackers, their elders sat round the fire and gossiped of the family.

James sat by himself looking out of the window until Benjamin Halfyard drew him into the fun.

" I made James promise he'd never whisper a word when I bought these fal-lals, didn't I, James ? "

" You did, Ben, and I kept my promise."

They pulled the crackers and donned paper crowns and caps.

David sat in the easiest chair, pulled down the sleeves of his under-vest as usual, and put his boots to the blaze. He heard that Anstice was with child, and wondered if Pascoe would have a son.

" If so, I hope it will die," he said, " for it would certainly grow up into such an odious fashion of creature as himself."

Nathan turned the conversation from this dangerous topic.

" Did I tell you about the Duchy bailiff ? " he asked. " That man's a figure of fun to a thoughtful mind. But he gets more puzzle-headed and silly every day he lives."

" Samuel Bastard, you mean ? Fegs ! You're right ; he's a long way the biggest fool ever stood for Duchy, and that's saying a lot."

" But not too much," declared Nathan. " List to what happened last week. Mr. Bastard, he came along on his

hoss while I was looking at the wall in the croft over the way. 'Morning, sir,' I said. 'Good morning, Mortimer,' he said, though not as if he meant it. 'I'm very wishful to see you,' I told the man, 'but I won't keep you a brace of shakes. 'Tis like this—the stream runs t'other side of this wall, bursting with fatness for my ducks, and safe from dogs and what not to trouble 'em; and I'm terrible set on opening a hole just here and taking out a few stones, so as the birds can go to the water without let, and not face the dangers of the road. 'Tis a dry-built wall, and I can make all trim and vitty in half an hour, and no harm to nobody, if you'll give the word.' Then Bastard, he strokes his chin and nods and looks at the wall and knits up his eyebrows and considers, as if I'd asked him to build another story to my house, or take in a hundred acres of common. 'Twould improve the value of the property,' I says, crafty like; and he says, 'So it would, because it might improve the value of ducks raised on the property.' Then he makes a note of it in his book if you please, and says, 'I'll turn it over, Mortimer. I don't say it can be done, however; but at the same time I don't say it can't be done. Where a duck can go, a fox can go—don't you forget that. I'm very much against tampering with Duchy property, as you know; but I'll weigh it in all its bearings, and if I decide against, you'll understand I've got very sound reasons for so doing.' All that jaw about two or three stones in a wall!"

"Why don't you ask him to send a telegram to the Prince of Wales and put you out of your misery, Uncle Nathan?" suggested Barry.

"No, no, you can't do nothing like that with Bastard. He's a very solemn man, and his office sits heavy on him."

"I'd have took the stones out and said nought about them," added his nephew.

"Wrong again. He's got a hawk's eye, that chap. He'd have seen 'em and set 'em back in a jiffy; and then not the Houses of Parliament would ever have got 'em out again. A dogged man, and not to be shifted. Duchy's his god, though it may be our devil; and, if he thought Duchy was losing a halfpenny a year by any act of his, he'd go silly."

"What was the end of it?" asked Sarah.

"Four days later he came by again and spent half an hour with me, and wished me all the blessings of the season, for he's a most kind-hearted man. Then he broke it to me, as if he was breaking a death, that the ducks must go round as usual, because he couldn't see his way to have the wall touched. 'Twas creating a dangerous and far-reaching 'precedent,' and he hoped, as an old tenant, universally respected and so on, that I'd grant he was in the right. An amazing sort of mind he've got. I can honestly say I was sorrier for the chap than for myself, because such pettifogging showed that Bastard hadn't got even a second-class brain."

"No human brain at all," said Barry. "The brain of a dormouse, I reekon."

They had expected some forcible expression of opinion from David on this narrative; but the head of the family was sound asleep, and not their laughter wakened him. He lay back with his eyes shut, his nostrils extended and his eternal grin accentuated by the relaxed muscles of his jowl. He breathed stertorously, and Nathan decided that he had better be awakened.

"He's got the indigestion, I reekon," he said.

David was not pleased at being roused. He grunted to himself, asked for a cup of tea, and declared he must be off.

"You wasn't so clever as you think with your blasted plum-pudden," he said to May Mortimer. "I took no more than a crumb, but 'tis swelled to a cannon-ball, and be lodged under my left spare rib."

He drank tea presently, then decided to go home with Barry, who had to return before dusk to milk the cows.

They started ere long, and, on the high road, fell in with Jack Bascombe and his wife, also upon their homeward way.

"A very good dinner we've had, and a very good thing has happened," said Jenny Bascombe. "My son, Little Jack, have managed to make it up with the maiden, Jane Bond. In a word, she's forgived him for fancied wrongs, and they took their meal with us. A good man, Mr. White, if ever there was one."

Barry declared his satisfaction; but David Mortimer said nothing until they reached home. Then he spoke to Jenny.

"There'll be no supper to-night," he said. "We've had our load to-day, and any more food till morning would be wicked waste."

CHAPTER XX

THE MASTER TOPIC

When David and his nephew were gone the family fell back on the familiar theme, and Mr. Halfyard, now received as a future member, contributed to the subject.

"I shouldn't forget my manners to speak of such a thing," he said, "but since you are mentioning Mr. David's money, I may tell you it's a subject often discussed at Princetown."

"No doubt," answered Mary Worth. "Where there's a mystery like that, people will be talking."

"I used to hear 'em speak free before me," explained Ben, "because I was like themselves; but they won't no more, of course, now I'm tokened to Damaris. At 'The Plume of Feathers' 'tis a subject that passes the time oft enough."

"And what do they pitch the figure at?" asked Nathan—"my brother's money, I mean."

"Opinions vary a good bit. Some go as high as twenty thousand, and some as low as five, so, no doubt, it lies between them points."

"When he was a young youth he used to say he'd die worth twenty thousand," declared Sarah. "I remember father laughing at him."

"Well, he makes a lot of money, and, of course, other farmers know that," explained Mr. Halfyard. "'Tisn't what he saves by his famous manner of life, because that wouldn't make any great difference."

"It would," argued May Mortimer. "Spread over fifty years and more, such thrift must save hundreds and hundreds."

"They say it's what he does with cattle that will be found to count. They whisper, if I may say so, that he dodges Duchy laws, and keeps a lot more things on the moor in summer than he could feed at Nun's Cross in winter. He's a crafty man."

"It can't in reason be less than ten thousand," said Nathan; "but, for my part, I guess it is a bit more. And he does dodge the laws, no doubt. It gives him pleasure so to do."

"Do the people ever guess at how he'll leave his money, Ben?" asked Damaris.

"They do," he answered. "In a general sort of way other people's money don't interest a man over-much unless he's got a look in hisself; but in this case they've lifted Mr. David into a famous miser, if you'll excuse such strong language, and so they wonder a good bit. And some say he'll leave it to the members of his family, and some doubt if he's likely to do that, because he's got such a coorious objection to females. They think that Mr. Nathan will get it."

"Not a chance!" said Nathan. "I've been a very good brother to him, as all the world knows; but he's got no more liking for me than any other human creature. 'Tis a puzzling problem, because no man can tell where he has a liking. He don't hold with institutions, or charities, or nothing like that. He's never took a hand in public affairs in his life, or given a penny to a righteous cause, that I know on."

"Some say he's took a fancy to Barry, and thinks a lot of him," said Benjamin.

"I believe that," replied Barry's mother. "And, what's more, and what's a lot stranger in my opinion, Barry's took a fancy to him."

"Never!" exclaimed May Mortimer.

"He has, May. When he went to Nun's Cross, Damaris and James and me asked ourselves how long such a man as Barry would endure it, and we gave him but a few weeks to be off; and, for my part, I fretted not a little as a mother, because I thought Barry would doom himself with David very soon, and lose any family friendship my brother might have for him. But, instead of that, there he is, and you saw to-night how free he can be with his uncle. David will stand more from him than anybody on earth."

"Barry's clever," said James. "He's got a brain, and he pretends a lot more than he feels. You've got to pretend with Uncle David, if you want to please him,

because he's different from everybody else and thinks contrary to ordinary people's thoughts. He don't know Barry, really."

"It isn't all pretence, James," declared Damaris. "Barry told me himself that you can't pretend with Uncle David, because he sees through you if you try it on. He saw through Barry once, and warned him. Of course, Barry says things he don't mean, and laughs at Uncle David's jokes, though he don't hold with them really; but Uncle David's changed him a lot, and the longer they are together the more he will change him. Barry's a deal keener after money, for one thing."

"You don't say that, Damaris?" asked Sarah Mortimer.

"Yes, I do, Aunt Sarah, and mother knows it. Last Christmas he gave us all presents. This Christmas he didn't. He's saving a bit himself."

"That's to the good," said Halfyard.

"The pinch will come when Barry wants to take a wife," prophesied Sarah.

"There, again," said Barry's mother. "You might say that he was the marrying sort; but I shouldn't wonder, now, if his uncle turns him away from marriage and makes him hate the women, same as he does."

James and Damaris simultaneously smiled in their hearts, but gave no sign. Both knew Barry's secret, but neither was aware that the other had discovered it.

"I don't think so bad of Barry," said his sister. "When the time comes, I'm sure he wouldn't let Uncle David, or anybody else, choke him off the right one."

"I always thought Barry would be as poor as a coot," said James; "but now I don't think he will be. Barry's a very clever man in my opinion."

They returned to the money.

"Seeing there's no sign in any direction that he'll leave his stuff away from us, 'tis a great question how he'll divide it," said Nathan.

"Perhaps he won't bother himself to make a will at all," suggested his wife. "A man like him would know that to make a will be to take thought for other people; and that's contrary to his rule."

"An idea," admitted Nathan. "He's just the sort to feel, since he can't take his cash with him, it don't matter a damn. If he had any particular hatred against us, then he'd go out of his way to cross us in the matter; but you can't fairly say he hates any of us. He's just indifferent."

"He'll always accept what we've got to give, from men and women alike," said Mary.

"He hates me, for one," declared James.

"You can't say that, James."

"Yes, I can, Damaris. It's natural he should. And he hated Anstice. You can rule us out—because he hates Mr. Pascoe, too."

"'Tis true. My son-in-law wakes the devil in him," admitted Nathan. "Yet, such is the saving instinct of the man, he'll not let hate come between him and a pinch of shoe-leather. He'll ask Pascoe to drive him into Princetown just as soon as he'll ask anybody. Never did David lose half a farthing in his life for not asking. A gentleman's child to Princetown thought he was a beggar four nights ago and offered him a threp'ny piece; and he took it, and thanked her and wished her a merry Christmas!"

"There's one he's wished a merry Christmas to, then," said Damaris.

"If he hadn't made no will, how would it go?" asked Benjamin Halfyard.

"The next of kin would take all, I suppose," answered Nathan. "If, for example, the man left twelve thousand, then I should get four thousand, and my sisters each the same."

"I'm sure I hope it may fall out so," said Mary. "'Twould be a very fair and fortunate thing."

James had been speculating on a former point.

"You say he'd never lose a farthing for hate, Uncle Nathan, but, according to Barry, that's doubtful. He's a good hater, we all know, and Barry says, where the Powers are concerned, he reckons that Uncle David wouldn't mind losing a bit if he could score against 'em."

"Meaning Duchy?" asked Sarah.

"Meaning everything that has any call on his cash. He argues that he's outside the State, just as much as if he lived on a desert island. And so he says it's a sin and

a robbery to ask him for a penny of taxes, or rates, or such-like. And so, if he could chouse the State, he might."

"That's a crime," answered Nathan.

"He'd never put himself in reach of the law," said Sarah.

"He wouldn't put himself in reach; but he might overreach it."

"A parlous game. I'm sure I hope he'll never get in the papers, poor old man," continued Sarah.

"Do he confide in Barry at all, I wonder?" asked May Mortimer.

"We shouldn't know if he did," answered Mary.

"Barry can be as close as anybody," added Damaris; "and if Uncle David was to tell him secrets, he'd keep 'em."

"He would," said Barry's mother; "and secrets are hateful things, and seldom come to good. If he was to make Barry a hard, secret sort of man, like himself, he'd ruin him and spoil his character."

"He won't do that, I'm sure," pronounced Sarah. "You can tell a lot by the face of the man. Barry will never grow mean and close, and turn against human nature—not with a face like his."

They talked on till a clock chimed eleven. Then, with plans for meeting next day—shooting for Nathan and Benjamin, and tea at Strane Steps for May and Sarah—the party broke up. They renewed their good wishes for the coming year and their thanks to Mr. Mortimer for his hospitality.

"May we meet again as to-day many times," said he.

CHAPTER XXI

AN EVENT

Barry was wondering next morning if diplomacy would enable him to snatch an hour or two for Princetown ; but Mr. Bascombe held it impossible.

" Public holidays be hell to him," said Jack. " He's long dared us to name 'em when they come."

He and his wife, with young Worth and another man, were eating breakfast largely by firelight, for the morning was dark and, at half-past six, only a patch of dim grey light filled the square outline of the window.

" Where is he ? " asked David's nephew. The master had not appeared, and he was seldom late for a meal.

" Very like he slept badly along of his heavy feeding," said Jenny. " I shouldn't wonder if he wasn't awake yet."

But when Barry returned from the byres and Jack brought in the milk for the Princetown cart to catch the train, David Mortimer still gave no sign.

His nephew went to the door, listened awhile and, hearing no stir, knocked. But David did not answer and he tried the door on impulse, knowing all the time that it was locked. It did not give, and Barry stood still and wondered. His mind leapt forward to prodigious possibilities. Could it be that the old man was gone ? At any rate something very contrary to rule had happened, and he descended to Jenny Bascombe.

" There's trouble, I'm afraid," he said. " He doesn't answer. I'll get the ladder and go up to the window. We must reach him, for he may want us."

" 'Tis heavy sleep, be sure," said Jack. " He sleeps like a log. He'll rise up at noon."

But Barry felt action must be taken. He went to the yard, set a ladder to his uncle's window and ascended. The blind was never drawn and, peering in, he saw David Mortimer, motionless and snug enough under his bedclothes. He tapped loudly, but won no response. Then

taking a knife from his pocket, Barry inserted the blade behind the hasp, thrust it back and pulled up the sash. Next he jumped noisily into the room, but still his uncle made no move.

The place was nearly bare and held but few things besides a bed, a chair and a small, worn square of old carpet. In one corner stood a roll-topped desk, similar to that in David's counting-house below. The young man approached his uncle, addressed him loudly, then put a hand upon his shoulder. But still David did not move, and Barry went to the door, unlocked it, and called Jenny Bascombe.

"Come up," he shouted.

Jenny appeared. Intuition had already told her the truth, and she went without fear to her master's pallet. He lay under some old blankets, with a red night-cap on his head. He wore his day shirt and under-vest, but had taken off his collar and the remainder of his clothes. He appeared placid, his eyes were shut, and his face exhibited no discomfort.

"Dead asleep, seemingly," said the young man.

"He's dead all right. He ain't asleep," answered Jenny. "He's been dead a longful time, I reckon. All's cold."

Jack entered at the same moment, and the face of the other hind looked round the door.

Barry approached and stared at his uncle.

"My God! D'you mean it?" he asked.

"Feel him," said the woman.

In the great silence that fell upon them they heard the ticking of David's watch on the chair at his head. It seemed to stare up at them—an old 'turnip' on a steel chain, that he was used to carry in a fob.

It still seemed impossible to David's nephew that he gazed at anything but sleep, so easy and comfortable did the dead appear.

"Get a hot brick to his feet, Jenny; and you ride for the doctor, Bascombe—ride so fast as you can," he ordered.

"And better call for Mrs. Dennis the same time, Jack," said Mrs. Bascombe. "He must be laid out. And tell the undertaker."

It seemed impossible to believe that the stern spirit of

Nun's Cross had fled, and Barry could not believe it. Jack was soon away, and Jenny applied heat as directed, knowing very well that all effort must be vain.

Time dragged interminably and young Worth, once convinced that his uncle had departed, fell to musing on the great change. He did not seek his people, but turned to work; then he came in again and wrote a letter to Mortimer's lawyer at Plymouth. He meant to give it to the postman, should he appear presently; but he remembered it was Bank Holiday and there would be no postman.

He ascended to his uncle's room and went through the pockets of his clothes. David's scanty wardrobe was deposited in a box outside on the landing. He had worn his best on the previous day, and his black suit hung on the foot of his bed. Barry found a pocket-book, a bunch of keys, and a red handkerchief; but nothing else. The pocket-book and keys he took into his own room and locked up till the lawyer should arrive.

He experienced many strange emotions, yet felt, as the most lasting wonder, a sense of freedom. To think that the old discipline was done—that never again, under any possible circumstances, could he have such a master, made the young man meditate curiously; and then came the inevitable interest concerning his uncle's money—its amount and bestowal. In his thought he retraced the ground that his family had travelled on the previous night. He was as ignorant as they, for David had never divulged his intentions. From his general criticisms on every member of his family, it would have been hard to see much hope for one more than another; but the money had to go somewhere, and Barry felt tolerably sanguine that it must remain with the dead man's kindred. He had actually heard David say on one occasion that no woman should ever benefit by him; and if that were true, there remained only himself, his brother and his uncle. Jack Bascombe might benefit also; but that was no certainty. Nothing was certain.

He passed presently to an honest regret at his uncle's sudden death. For the old man it was a fine end—sudden and painless. He felt glad for him; but he knew that departure of a character so strong must create a void. Barry, of all his clan, had felt most comradeship with the

head of it. He had frankly admired David, appreciated his differences from other men and rather gloried in them, because they made the bulk of humanity seem tame and saltless beside him. There was a quality of will, a steadiness of aim, a raptorial swiftness on the scent of his prey, an indifference to every side issue, a sleepless concentration that Barry rejoiced at, though sometimes only in secret, when his uncle outraged the sense of the community. The young man's character was already influenced more than he imagined. Unconscious cynicism had begun to eat like a cancer into his outlook on life, and from the austere environment of Nun's Cross he gazed with increasing contempt on the outer world. He was proud of his uncle and had always supported him, so that of late men who would speak harshly against David Mortimer in any presence but his own, had begun to perceive that Barry was against them. He noted this and was glad of the reflected glory. An old acquaintance or two admonished him and warned him against coming under influences so pitiless at his age. His mother especially was quick to note the indications of a change in his values and felt the young man would draw barriers between him and his fellow-creatures if it continued; while Marian also recognised the danger and protested forcibly when her lover sometimes spoke with the words of David Mortimer.

"If I thought you meant it, Barry, we should fall out," she said more than once.

But now David was gone, and it remained to be seen how deeply his corrosive qualities had bitten into the boy. As for Barry, he felt more sorry than glad at this hour, and presently welcomed distraction and the necessity for movement and speech with other people.

A doctor arrived with Mrs. Dennis, and the appearance of Marian's mother brought strangely and forcibly to Barry's mind the recollection that any need for mystery was at an end. The world might now learn that he was betrothed. None but would congratulate him at the news. And even as he reflected upon this great fact, there came into his soul a twinge of regret—even remorse—an instinct of disloyalty to dead David.

The doctor had little to say.

"His heart stopped after he had gone to sleep," he said.

"That's all there is to it—heart failure. Did himself too well on Christmas Day, no doubt, and that settled it. His heart was always weak, and I've warned him for years to eat better food and less of it. Also to stop physical work. No need of an inquest. Call for the certificate when you're in Princetown. It's a shock to you, no doubt; but none to me. A very remarkable man. Does his family know?"

"I'm just off to tell them," said Barry, "—only waited for you."

He descended to White Works presently as Jack Bascombe arrived from Princetown in an open trap with the undertaker. Barry stopped, ordered the best oak with brass mountings, and then went his way.

To his mother he first told the news and Damaris flew to tell the rest. It was as though one had stuck a stick into an ant's nest. Sarah popped from her house with a shawl over her head, and May Mortimer hastened out of hers. A boy ran down into Fox Tor Mire, where Nathan had gone to shoot snipe with Ben Halfyard. They were not above a mile distant. Then Anstice came from Strane Steps and her Aunt Rebecca followed her, while at a decent interval appeared Charles himself. He was spending his holiday at the fireside. They all drifted to the home of Mary Worth, where Barry might be seen and heard. He told them briefly that David Mortimer had died in his sleep, and they did not conceal acute interest and excitement, though none, save Sarah, was moved at the tragedy.

She expressed no more sorrow than the rest, but grew pensive and her mind buried itself in the past. Not one was able to realise so tremendous an event. To grasp the fact that the supreme, dominating interest of their lives —the favourite theme, the never-failing salt to conversation, the centre of anecdote, the savour of everyday existence was taken from them—this effort of imagination appeared for the moment beyond their power. They all talked together, and sometimes speech took them away from the event of the hour. Damaris even once spoke forgetting what had happened.

Then slowly they grasped the truth and began to dwell on the little, passing incidents that must soon follow. But

the great movements and changes were beyond power to measure at present; for these depended on the plans and purposes of the dead. The women spoke of the funeral and their mourning. They reminded one another of garments laid away, and began to want to go and look into their cupboards. Charles assumed that his family would be invited to the obsequies, and advised that the funeral meal should be taken at White Works rather than Nun's Cross.

"We all belong here, if I may say so," he remarked, "and I expect, as there's no family at Nun's Cross——"

Then, to his mother's surprise, Barry interrupted him.

"It will be done in order, Charles," he said. "The funeral goes from Nun's Cross and the mourners go back there after, as they should do."

May Mortimer, who had never liked Barry, then spoke.

"That's for your uncle to decide," she said. "He takes the lead now, I suppose, not you."

"There's a right and a wrong way," he answered, "and it wouldn't be respectful to Uncle David to have the funeral feast away from Nun's Cross. Jenny Baseombe can be trusted to do everything right."

"A feast at Nun's Cross!" murmured Damaris.

"Nathan wouldn't do anything disrespectful to poor David—be sure of that," asserted Barry's mother.

"I meant no disrespect," declared Charles Pascoe. "I was only thinking of the convenience of the ladies. However, my father-in-law will decide."

"'Twill change the face of the whole earth in a manner of speaking," murmured Sarah. "Us shan't grasp it for a bit, I expect. Such a sudden death to such a man leaves the living all over the place."

"So it does, Aunt Sarah. That's just how I feel," said her nephew.

"I hope all will be as you would wish," ventured Mr. Pascoe. "Heartily me and mine hope that."

"We know nothing—unless Barry does," answered Mary.

"Nothing at all do I know. He went to Plymouth about six weeks ago to his lawyer, but said nought when he came back."

"'Twas his habit to go down about four or five times a

year," said Sarah. "'Twas his pleasure to get a lift sometimes for nought."

"The lawyer ought to be communicated with," advised Charles, and Barry told him that he had already written a letter.

"'Tis in my pocket and I'll post it at Princetown presently," he said.

"It would have been better to have let your uncle do that," remarked May Mortimer; and as she spoke Nathan himself arrived. He was greatly concerned and made some of the women feel a little callous and guilty, for he adopted an attitude of apparent regret.

"What a fearful come-along-of-it!" he began. "I hope to God 'twas nothing he ate at my table yesterday!"

"Yes, it was," replied Barry. "Not the quality, Uncle Nathan, but the quantity. Doctor says he did himself too well, and the heart, no doubt, couldn't stand against it, being a weak member. So it just stopped, and he died without waking."

"What a way to go!" whispered Rebecca Pascoe.

"'Tis nothing against his memory, if you meant that," answered Barry sharply. "It might have happened to any old person with a good appetite."

"I ain't saying a word against his memory," replied Miss Pascoe, growing red. "That's not my business."

"Or anybody's business," declared Charles. "In these cases the memory of the deceased depends largely upon his will. We must assume that he was a just person until we know to the contrary."

"To think—the head of the family gone!" mused Nathan. "A man of very great parts, though he didn't see eye to eye with his neighbours. The sort of man that leaves a gap, however. We shall be sorry now, I reckon, that we said many things we did say."

The thought of the void created by his passing struck them all in turn; but Mrs. Mortimer did not echo her husband's sentiments.

"Not at all," answered his wife. "That's nonsense, Nathan, and, because he's dead, it don't make the general opinion about him wrong. None of you ever said what wasn't true against David. And we can go on being

honest with ourselves, as before. He hated me, anyway, and I hated him."

"We may find that in death he was just," suggested Sarah, "though in life he was not. Of course, justice to him may not look like justice to us."

"In justice, which is safe ground," replied Charles, "we should expect to find that he had not allowed any prejudice to come between him and a proper disposal of his property."

"And what would that be, I wonder?" asked Damaris.

"I shouldn't presume to say, because it is no business of mine, and I haven't thought about it," replied Charles; "but, if you ask my opinion, I expect and hope that his brother and sisters would be the first idea in his mind, and then his nephews and nieces."

"The head of the family now is my husband," declared May Mortimer, "and, in justice, he should have been the first to be thought on."

"I don't quarrel with that," answered Mr. Pascoe, who looked far ahead.

"You can't calculate on anything," replied Nathan, "because my late brother was not as other men. All is mystery until the lawyer comes and the will is read—if will there be."

"With such a man it might happen fairer if there wasn't a will," suggested Rebecca Pascoe. And then the tongues buzzed again until, in momentary silence, Anstice spoke.

"When shall you go to see him?" she asked her Aunt Sarah.

None of them had yet thought of that.

Nathan answered.

"To-day. We'll all go up over and take the last, long look after dinner. But not you, Anstice. In your state 'tis better you shouldn't."

"I want to," she said.

"No, my dear," asserted Charles. "Quite out of the question. Your business is life, not death, at present."

"I'm wishful to go, Charles."

"Not if you think it over. To the funeral you shall go, however. The clay's of no account."

The Pascoes departed then, together, and it was Mary's turn to criticise.

"Why for did he want to come? This is no affair of his."

"Being my daughter's husband, it is his affair," answered Mrs. Mortimer.

Barry declined to stop to dinner with his mother.

"I'm going to Princetown," he said, "and I'll be back at Nun's Cross later. Jenny will brew a dish of herby tea for you. We haven't got anything else—unless I bring it—yes, I'll bring some from Edwards's shop. They're going to take him down into the parlour. Mrs. Dennis came early. I'll attend to the grave."

"There's a place beside our parents," said Sarah.

"I know. See you later."

Then he left them, and May spoke.

"He's taking a great deal upon himself, in my opinion."

"He was his uncle's right hand, wasn't he?" snapped Mary.

"Not that I know of. Your brother had no right hand but his own, surely."

Nathan calmed them.

"Be at peace," he said. "Barry's doing nothing that don't become him. Us'll go home now, May. I'm feeling this a good deal. To think last night, while we had our fun and he was more than common gentle—and the Angel of Death so near! We'll meet, half after two, and look our last upon him. And let's have no sharp speeches. This is no time for them."

Then Nathan and his wife went home, while Barry walked to Princetown and proceeded first to the church.

He stood beside the family graves, then called on the sexton and gave his directions. Everybody had heard that David Mortimer was dead, and the young man found himself accosted on all sides. He turned in to 'The Plume of Feathers' presently, and ate a solitary lunch in the bar parlour. The innkeeper waited upon him, and heard such particulars as Barry cared to give. Later he went into the bar and, the hour being an empty one, found opportunity of speech with his sweetheart. He smoked for the first time that day, and told her about his uncle's death. She had heard of the event and was deeply interested. His attitude surprised her, for he revealed sincere regret.

" I can't believe it yet. It seems impossible that such a cast-iron sort of chap should vanish in a night. One knew he had a weak spot or two, but he seemed so strong and keen and hard. He defied everything and everybody in such a way that you couldn't remember that he was only flesh and blood. It's a tremendous shock."

" It must be. I hope everything will go right," said Marian.

" They all think of that, and only that," he answered impatiently. " Nobody knows the fine side of the old man but me."

" What did you call his fine side ? "

" I've told you scores of times. His pluck and his scorn of pretence and nonsense. His powers of going without and living hard and saying what he thought."

" Yes, he did that. But there's different ways of saying what you think. You can't deny he bruised people all round."

" Only those that were soft enough to bruise. He never bruised me."

" Yet I've heard you say—however, he's gone. I wonder what will become of the balance of the lease at Nun's Cross ? "

" We know nought."

" I suppose his next of kin will have it on their hands ? "

" For my part, I believe he's left a will. He was a man that left nothing to chance."

" He knew his days were doubtful."

" I wouldn't say that. He mistrusted doctors."

" Like he mistrusted everybody else."

" Yes. And who don't mistrust everybody ? I do."

" You didn't before you went to him, however."

" He taught me a lot worth knowing, and I shan't forget what he taught me."

" Well, we're always frank, Barry, and have got no secrets, and, please God, never will have ; and I'm not going to pretend I'm very sorry for this."

" Why aren't you sorry ? If I am, you ought to be, too."

" Because—and it's no news to you—I never did think Mr. Mortimer did you any good."

" I know well he did. He's put steel into me."

"You can't see, because you're too near yourself; but I could see, and Damaris could see. He was making a mark on you—natural enough, him being old and experienced and you being young. He was making you fond of money."

"And why not? Who isn't, whatever they pretend?"

"Fond of it for itself, I mean."

"If you think I'm a miser, say so, Marian."

"People ain't born misers, my dear boy. Never was a chap less a miser than you. But his way of life—that I thought you'd have hated—seemed to grow on you. However, he's gone."

"And you're glad."

"You can't be surprised I'm glad, for the need of our secrecy has gone with him."

He nodded.

"That's true. I grant a queer feeling of freedom came over me, Marian. But don't say nothing for the moment till he's in his grave. It would be rather mean, in my opinion."

"There it is," she cried. "Doesn't that show he was a cruel old man, Barry? You can't respect his memory for hating women, anyway. That's nothing to admire."

"He had his reasons."

"I don't know anything about that. When's the funeral?"

"Want him underground—eh? Natural, no doubt. Then you'll feel safe. I understand that. Nothing's settled. I must get back now. My people are coming up to Nun's Cross this afternoon to take a last look at him. It's hard to believe he's dead. That calm—just like sleep. And last night I never saw him more cheerful or kinder like."

"No worry, nor pain, nor nothing. That was a blessing, I'm sure."

"Yes—all right in that respect."

"I suppose you have no idea about the future?"

"None yet. Must see to everything at Nun's Cross, and sell the stock and farm stuff, I suppose."

"I'm sorry I said I was glad, Barry. I didn't ought. Blood's thicker than water. 'Tis natural you're cast down Forgive me for that."

He was moody and melancholy still.

"I knew his parts. I'll tell you about him some time. We'll get a good talk this week. No need to plot and plan no more. I always look to you for understanding. I don't hope for a brass button, or expect it. We were friendly—that's all. He often chid me. But the money's got to go to somebody, and they figure it out at a lot. So we may be able to come together pretty soon, perhaps, with any luck. You wouldn't feel hard against him no more if that happened, I reckon?"

"Indeed I should not," said Marian.

He left her and crossed to the general store, where his brother stood behind the counter in a white apron.

"Afternoon, James," he said. "I'm wanting a pound of tea."

He explained the reason, and James served him.

"He's really gone, then, Barry?"

"Yes, he's gone. Can you get off to have a look at him? If so, we'll go together."

"I don't want to have a look at him—at least, I don't think I do," said James.

"You'll never see such a wonderful man again in your life—no more will any of us."

Barry took his tea and proceeded by way of South Hessary to Nun's Cross.

CHAPTER XXII

AFTERWARDS

Four days later David Mortimer was buried at Princetown churchyard. At noon half a dozen black-coated figures wandered in the burying-ground and waited for the funeral, while round the entrance a crowd of women and children dawdled. In the township no indication of respect or regret marked the moment, and not a blind was down.

Little Jack and Jane Bond moved together among the graves, and the man spoke concerning one or two of the silent people.

"That's where all the Mortimers be put in," he said, standing beside the open grave. "And the Worths neighbour with 'em. And there's the Pascoes—very orderly, as their manner is, and nicely kept still. They be Mr. Charles's parents and sister. And my Mr. White have got his family row by the hedge. Not that he takes much stock of 'em."

"Who be there?" asked Jane presently, pointing to a resting-place bright with a little bunch of berried holly.

"That's the man they used to call 'Moleskin'—that baggering old poacher from Rundlestone. He lies between two good-looking women, as a chap pointed out to me when he went under last October. Such a blade as he was for the females to the last, no doubt, 'twould be a great comfort to him if he knew his company."

Then Little Jack visited another tomb.

"I'm always terrible addicted to this," he said, "because of the motto. It's a very ancient woman of the Worth family, and she wrote her own words. You can hardly see 'em, but I know 'em by heart."

He read from a lichened slate:

"'*Here lies the body of Betsy Worth, who did all she*

could for God. Now God will do all He can for Betsy Worth.' "

Jane mused on the quick and turned from the dead.

"They're all wondering who'll be remembered, Jack."

"Ban't no use wondering—they'll hear to-day."

"If he was fair and straight, he'd think of your father and mother and you before most people."

"So father said; but I warned him steadfast against it. The old man never done what you'd expect; and he won't no more in death than life. 'Tis sure to be an unexpected blow—his will—because his custom was always to surprise people in an unpleasant way. And if there's one person on earth as won't get a stiver, 'tis me; because he never forgave me for leaving him."

"Beast! They reckon there should be a great dollop of money. I heard Miss Sarah talking to Miss Pascoe."

"A dollop without a doubt."

They turned, for a clergyman had emerged from the vestry and the bell was tolling.

The funeral arrived—a hearse and three mourning carriages. Beside the minister, who waited at the gate, there stood a little, round-faced man in a black top-coat and black silk hat. He had come from Plymouth to attend the funeral and then return to Nun's Cross with the mourners.

In the first coach drove Nathan Mortimer, his wife and his two sisters; in the second came Barry and James, Damaris and Anstice. The third was occupied by Mr. Pascoe and his aunt, with Jack and Jenny Bascombe.

The day had dawned grey, cold and dry.

The lawyer was known to none of the party, but Mr. Square introduced himself to Nathan Mortimer, and spoke for a moment as the procession formed for church.

He set all their minds at rest in one particular: there was a will, and he had brought it with him.

The business of returning David Mortimer to earth occupied no great length of time. The old man, hidden for ever in his oak and brass, sank out of sight, and to more than one meditative spectator it occurred that he would have resented the price of a coffin so handsome and a funeral so elaborate.

"I can hear him saying the very words," whispered

James to Anstice. "He'd have said, 'Fegs! Why the hell weren't it a walking funeral, and what fool be spending my money on a coffin like this here?'"

"He'd better far have liked to burn in a rubbish heap all to once with other old stuff, Master James," said Little Jack, who stood beside them.

All took the conventional last look at the coffin-lid and then the coaches drew the party back to Nun's Cross. Charles and Miss Pascoe, who had been specially invited, remained with the mourners and joined them in a cold repast already prepared.

There was no pretence at sentiment, and the lawyer proved a genial, cheerful man. Satisfied that he would be driven back to Princetown in ample time for his train, he made a good meal and then, with Nathan Mortimer, opened David's desks and collected various papers, memoranda and moneys that occupied them. The will he had brought with him, but gave no hint of its contents until dinner was done, the cold beef and cold fowls eaten, and two bottles of brown sherry drunk. Then he took his bag and went to the bare parlour—an empty, featureless room into which David had seldom intruded.

Jenny had lighted a fire here, and now she followed the mourners with chairs from the kitchen. These she deposited and left the family.

"I shall not detain you five minutes," said Mr. Square. "The will could hardly be shorter. He made others in the past. This is, in fact, the fourth. It is some months old, and we have only to do with his final purpose. He leaves, roughly speaking, six thousand pounds in cash. But this takes no account of his personal property here represented by stock and the farm implements and so forth."

"What do they represent, Barry?" asked his uncle.

"Somewhere in sight of another thousand, I dare say," answered the young man.

None hid his surprise; even Mr. Pascoe was moved. Indeed, it was he who spoke.

"D'you mean he only stood for six thousand?" he asked.

"When realised it will be near that figure, according to present prices. He was a man who much dreaded to have

all his eggs in one basket, but at the same time preserved a very logical and, in the result, a very satisfactory system. He entertained the profoundest belief in a certain sort of investment. He put his money into insurance societies; and when he did so—twenty and more than twenty years ago—all their stocks were far lower than they stand at present. To invest in them now would be a policy from which high rates of interest could hardly be hoped; but as he invested, long ago, the results are handsome and his estate has appreciated considerably."

He opened the will.

"Mr. David Mortimer leaves everything to his nephew, Barry Worth; but on one condition. He was an eccentric old man and, as you doubtless know, harboured an undying and dreadful antipathy to the gentler sex. But he was sane—no man saner—and he makes a vital condition on which his estate passes to his nephew. Mr. Worth must not marry."

Great silence fell on the listeners, and the sole legatee himself broke it. He had flushed to the roots of his hair, conscious that all eyes were upon him.

"And what if I do?" he asked.

Mr. Square regarded him curiously. It seemed unlikely that such a young and handsome youth should not be already dedicated to a woman. Indeed, the lawyer, knowing nothing of the facts, suspected this to be the case and that David Mortimer had been aware of it. Here was one of those human moments that brightened the arid waste of his profession.

"If you do, Mr. Worth, the next of kin inherit. The will says nothing more. It is at your service. I have, however, a letter for you. The deceased left it in my hands and directed that it was to be given by me into yours at his death. He attached importance to it. You are directed to read it in private—that means, of course, by yourself. Of its contents I know nothing."

He dived into his bag and brought out a bulky envelope heavily sealed with red wax. Barry thanked him and put it into his breast pocket. Then the lawyer prepared to go.

"You had better come down and see me at your convenience," he said. "There is no hurry, and you have

doubtless to consider your private affairs and your family's interests before you decide to inherit. Your letter, too, may have some bearing upon your conclusions. I hope so. But do nothing without telling me. Meantime, let me hear within a month or so of all the calls on the estate. I will prepare the necessary figures for probate and so forth. Are there any bills ? "

" If there are, they'll be with the papers from the desks. I know of nothing," answered Barry. He seemed dazed.

" Thank you all for your courtesy, then ; and command me at once if any problems arise. I am at the service of all concerned," concluded Mr. Square.

Then Jack Bascombe, who was waiting, drove him to the station and the family discussed the situation. But there was little to say. Nathan ran his eye over the will, handed it to James, and then spoke.

" Curious things must happen when you're dealing with curious men, and such as think differently and act differently from the bulk of human creatures. And so this has happened. I'm very glad his money hasn't gone out of the family and I'm very bitterly disappointed, but not surprised, that he hasn't remembered his brother and sisters. But things are as they are."

" How things will be, however, we can't tell," said his wife, looking at Barry.

The young man took no notice. He was now reading the will.

"I'm sure I congratulate you, Barry," said his mother doubtfully.

" Of course, of course ; so do we all," declared Nathan Mortimer, " and I hope—but there, Barry's got to face the facts himself. My brother's thrust rather an indecent situation upon us, as he was so fond of doing in life ; in truth, he's made it hard for us to open our mouths."

" And he's thrust an indecent situation on Barry, too," said James suddenly.

" He has, James ; you're quite right," answered Sarah. " It's a very difficult thing to talk about."

" It is, because we talk in the dark," continued James. " We know not whether we should be glad or sorry for Barry."

"That's what he can tell us, and only him," said May Mortimer.

Still Barry made no answer to the challenge. He had dropped the will and was staring in front of him.

Charles Pascoe rose.

"I think we will leave you," he said. "This is a purely family affair, and as my wife is not interested, except for her parents, we can get going. It all shows the danger and difficulty of being unlike other people. I should be the last to criticise the dead, because it is contrary to my feeling of honour to do so; but all the same, to tell a man he shan't marry and offer him a fortune on that condition is very improper. In fact, it is an unjust will and you mustn't pretend different."

"That's going too far," said Mary Worth. "I'm not meaning it was right to make conditions, which my son may or may not be able to accept; but it was perfectly just for my brother to leave him his fortune if he chose to."

"As a mother, it's not strange you think so, Mrs. Worth," replied Charles.

"Of course it was right," said James. "Barry was the only one who got on with him and understood him and endured him. And he knew that."

But Mr. Pascoe naturally desired the aggrandisement of his wife's people. Indeed, he still hoped for it.

"What is right will happen, as it invariably does, James, in my experience. It may be soon, or it may be late; but in the appointed time of Providence it happens. Therefore we can leave the future confidently to your brother. For the present good-bye; and thank you for your hospitality on this mournful occasion."

He left, and Anstice and Miss Rebecca left with him. Their departure seemed to awaken Barry from his reflections. He rose and went to the door to show them out. Already it seemed he acted as master of Nun's Cross. Nathan took the opportunity to ask a question while he was from the room.

"I suppose none of you has ever heard his name mentioned with a maiden?" he asked.

Neither James nor Damaris replied; but Mary assured her brother that she had not.

"To doom a man to be a bachelor—but there it is; we are talking in the dark," declared Mr. Mortimer.

"If Barry was in love, he wouldn't drop a girl for money," said James.

"'Tisn't what he is, but what he may be," answered May Mortimer. "How if a year hence he falls in love?"

Barry returned, and his mother put the question to him.

"You don't mind us talking, do you, Barry?"

"Not in the least if you want to," he replied.

"We was wondering what would happen if you fell in love with a nice young woman presently?"

Barry laughed.

"She'll have to show me more than six thousand pounds, I reckon."

He spoke with a grim touch that reminded them of David; but his mother was not deceived. Mary felt proud of her son, and her face showed it.

"You'll do what's right under such great responsibilities," she told him. "We all know that; and you wouldn't let worldly riches come between you and what was better—we know that, too."

He was restless and walked about the room with his eyes on the window.

"Perhaps you'd like some tea before you go," he said, and left them.

"There's a difference in him already," pointed out Sarah. "You can feel it."

"He's gone to read his letter, I expect," suggested Damaris. "Come to think of it, you can't expect him to be anything but a bit strange and dazed at such a tremendous thing falling out of the sky on him."

"The letter may tell him a lot and help him," suggested James.

"He don't want no help. He's a man of very good judgment," replied Barry's mother.

Nathan had been slowly digesting the facts.

"Well, I'm not going to say I'm not cruel disappointed, because I am," he told them. "I know when I wedded that David, owing to the kink in his nature, thought less kindly upon me; but I never imagined he'd carry it so far as this."

"You've got to remember one thing, however,'

answered Mary. "David might have moved actively against us and barred us out; but he didn't do that. He liked Barry more than us, and it often happens that a man likes a nephew, or niece, more than his brothers or sisters. But he didn't bar us out altogether. He might have willed so that whatever Barry did, or didn't, we should have been forgot; but he left it to Barry on a condition, knowing if Barry didn't keep the condition we should come into his money."

"That's very true, Mary," said Sarah.

"A cruel thing," murmured James, "a cruel thing, look at it how you will."

"Cruel to his family certainly," replied May Mortimer.

"I mean cruel to him," answered James. "I'm thinking of him. It means that he's tempted to put love of money higher than his right and proper instincts. If he was to fall in love now he'd be pulled up by the low feeling he'd lose money by it."

"Would he be pulled up?" asked Damaris. "I don't believe he would, James."

"He said he would, however," answered May. "He said that any girl would have to bring him as much as he'd lose by her. And that means, of course, he'll bide single."

"It was a joke," answered Barry's mother. "The man was laughing, May. I know him better than anybody in the world, I should think, and I'm very sure, if he fell in love, he'd drop the money, or anything else that stood between him and a girl, if she loved him properly."

"'Twould be a test for the girl, too," said Sarah. "Some—but, there, 'tis no use talking."

Damaris found her mind full of Marian Dennis, and James was also thinking about her.

"For my part, the times being what they are, then I hope he'll fall in love and justify your opinion, Mary," declared Nathan frankly. "We've got no secrets, and I'm not going to pretend that a bit of money wouldn't be useful to me. I'd hoped for a come-by-chance when David dropped, and, when all's said, 'tis no hardship for the rising generation to work hard for their living in youth, same as we did. I say this to you; of course, I wouldn't to my nephew."

"We may find that Barry will get light let into the affair when he reads David's letter," said Sarah.

"Don't hope it," answered her sister-in-law.

"Why not, May?"

"Because the written word is here in the will. His uncle will only have left a lot of stuff about what to do with the money, and how to let it breed and all that. If you think there's any going back on the will, you're wrong."

Barry returned in his working clothes.

"Hast read your uncle's letter?" asked Nathan.

"I haven't. 'Twill keep. I'll go into it presently. I must get to work this afternoon. There's things calling to be done."

"Quite right—you're master now," answered his uncle.

"Then we'd better not stop to tea," suggested Sarah.

"Do as you like. Jenny's brewing it for you. I must go out. I'll see you all pretty soon. Good-bye for to-day."

He nodded to them and departed in silence, for none spoke.

Then May Mortimer addressed the company.

"You can give up hope, you people," said Nathan's wife. "Mark me, that man have got more of his uncle in him than any of you thought for. And David knew it."

Mary flashed an angry glance at May; then with one accord they rose.

"Us won't stop to tea, I think, if Barry's away," said Nathan.

Presently they drifted down the hill—little black smudges on a featureless waste. They did not walk together. Nathan and his wife went first, and Sarah and Mary, with her children, followed at some distance.

"Poor Jenny Baseombe's properly sore because Jack wasn't remembered," said James.

"And not the only one who's sore," answered his Aunt Sarah.

They moved along, occupied with their thoughts. Mary felt uneasily proud; Damaris and James were wondering; only Sarah spoke from time to time.

CHAPTER XXIII

FREE

Barry talked with Jenny and Jack Bascombe presently. He felt a sense of relief at the departure of his family and was glad to drop the subject of the will. But other aspects of the new situation were presented by Jack, for in the labourer's mind two points persisted. His personal disappointment was great; his surprise still greater.

"That he should have left me and Jenny out is a jar; but it don't surprise me. Such a knock my wife warned me to expect when he went down to the pit; yet, looking back and minding all I'd done for him, I never could believe, when the time came, I'd be forgot. But so it is, and ain't surprising. What is surprising be his fortune."

"Didn't you think he'd leave so much, Jack?"

"Yes, Master Barry, and twice so much. I ban't very clever about big money; but when I look back over five-and-thirty year of skimping and screwing, and snails for broth, and cold hearths, and rushlights, and hard terms all round, I find myself surprised there weren't more came out of all the misery."

"Money's hard to get, Jack."

"I know that. But when you've once laid the foundations the house have got to grow. Scrape pence enough to breed, and they must breed—nought stops 'em. 'Tisn't the hard living so much as the clever farming should have made more. He's sold thousands and thousands of pounds worth of stock the last thirty years."

"I suppose 'tis too soon to ask you about the future," said Jenny. "I'm very glad you've got the fortune, and bitter sorry he's put up a bar between you and a wife, because that's a very wicked thing and may ruin your morals. You can dish him, of course, by getting a girl to live with you; but——"

Barry laughed.

"That's an idea, Jenny!"

"A damned wicked idea," said Mr. Baseombe, "and I'm 'shamed you allowed yourself to think it, Jenny."

"If you'd let me finish, you wouldn't say silly things," answered Mrs. Baseombe. "I was going to tell Master Barry that, if any such hateful contrivanee was in his mind, you and me would leave Nun's Cross that instant moment."

"So us would, then—and he knows it, I should hope."

"You don't leave Nun's Cross before I do. And as to contrivanees in my mind, Jenny—hateful or otherwise—there ain't any. I'm feeling more than I'm thinking. It's a proper mizmaze to be up against all this racket."

"No doubt it is," said Jack. "Because, as a man with his life to live, you've got to look forward. You might say, in your bachelor strength, that you'll do as he tells you, and go on like him and never seek a partner. But who knows what petticoat's hid for you in the future?"

"True," admitted the new master.

"You might have a young woman in your eye at the very moment for all us can tell," added Jenny, with craft.

"I might, as you say. What would you do in my place, Jaek?"

"If it was me, I wouldn't be under a dead man's hand," said Mr. Baseombe. "I'd go to my relations and I'd say, 'I mean to be a free man; here's your money.' But I'd do it cunning, and try to drive a bargain with 'em."

Barry listened.

"Money's power, however, and you can trust it better than a woman. I've often thought what might be done with Nun's Cross. We could make it a very nice place to live in, and if we spent a bit on winter keep and winter quarters, according to the law, we could run twiee the head of cattle we do run, and very soon turn six thousand into twelve. My uncle was a miser against his own power of money-making in some directions."

"His hatred of Duchy fought against his love of cash," explained Jack. "He knew the better he made Nun's Cross, the more would go into Duchy's pocket, soon or late. You can't outlive Duchy any more than you can outlive the devil. Duchy always has the last word.

Mr. David used to say that's why Duchy was like a woman, and another reason for hating it."

"I'm not like that. If the only way to increase your own money be to increase Duchy's, then I'd go on. I won't cut off my nose to spite my face, Jack."

"You might drop Duchy and buy a little farm outside Duchy, and have it for you very own, with all that money," said Bascombe.

"Yes, I might. Perhaps we'll clear out together. And yet I've got to like Nun's Cross a lot. I'd feel false to the old chap if I chucked it."

"'Tis a very nice place, I'm sure," said Jenny, "and, if you was to reign, and allow me a bit of help and a few inventions for comfort and decency, I'd never wish to go to any place else."

"Nor yet me, for that matter," declared Jack.

"Well, I've got to think about it. I'd like to be master here; and, if it happens, we three shan't quarrel. There'll be fair money for you both, and a bit to make up for the past also."

Jenny's eyes grew bright.

"Kind words like that be worth all the money," she said. "But we've growed so rough-tongued and took our colour from the dead that—there—don't you do nothing rash. Pray to God A'mighty. My master and me will be very glad to bide with you, I reckon. We like you very well—don't us, Jack?"

"Very well indeed—none better," answered her husband.

"I'm going over to Princetown now," answered Barry. "There's one there I want to see and tell about it."

"I daresay there would be."

He left them wondering, tramped the dusky moor, stood for a moment on South Hessary, and then proceeded to Princetown.

Thoughts ran deep with him and clashed like tide against wind. He felt enthusiasm for the man who had lifted him to such power, but he bitterly regretted the conditions thrust between him and the gift. He dreamed of the great life of enterprise that awaited him and the full promise of happiness it contained; but facts drew a hard and fast barrier between him and any such life. He

puzzled to see if there were a way by which faith might be kept and still the future enjoyed. Impulse took him to Marian now, and presently he stood before her.

The bar was full and the news had sped. Everybody appeared to know it, for Jack Bascombe broke the matter to a dozen when he drove the lawyer back to Princetown. Congratulations, coupled with much chaff, greeted Barry at 'The Plume of Feathers.' He received plenty of advice and stood a good many drinks. Then the bar grew empty towards closing time, and he was alone for awhile with his sweetheart.

"Old blade's gone to the grave, you see," he began. "I can't believe it, somehow, Marian."

"I don't wonder," she answered. "It all sounds like a fairy story. To think a real, live man could have wrote such a will as that!"

Thus she went straight to the point, as her custom was; but Barry dallied a little.

"You'd say that, same as other people who didn't know him. To me it isn't strange he should put it that way, understanding his famous hatred of the female. It was a sort of ruling passion with him, and he could offer scores of good reasons, I'm afraid. That don't astonish me. What does is that he should have thought such a terrible lot of me."

"So it does me," she declared. "But I feel that two ways. I'm proud for anybody and everybody to like you, knowing what you are so well and how you deserve it; but there's some people we'd sooner disliked us than didn't. And I've got a feeling that I'd rather such a queer man as your uncle hadn't liked you so well. Of course, it would have shown different if he'd known you was tokened and put a spoke in your wheel like this; but he didn't know it, unless some enemy found it out and told him."

Barry made no immediate comment on these remarks. Then she spoke again.

"I'm a lot put out over this, of course—for my own sake as well as yours, Barry. It's a very hateful trial to me—must be."

"He was a good friend to me."

"Are you so sure?"

" Of course he was. I grant that, knowing what we know, he left me nought; but he didn't know, and he thought he'd left me all. I never contradicted him when he cussed women, any more than I did when he cussed Duchy. In a word, he thought I was with him."

" Were you ? "

" Oftener than not. He was pretty wise and knew life, and what matters and what don't. He saw through things."

" He saw nought in things but his own interest. That's not to see through things. And now I say again that I'm glad he's dead—for your sake. Because, if he'd lived much longer, he'd have done you a powerful sight of harm and made you look at life same way as he did, and that was an own-self, cruel way."

" Don't you get shirty with him, Marian. He meant me well—remember that. He put me first and trusted me. And to be trusted by a man that trusted so little is a big order. In a way, you ought to think the better of me for it. It's a sign of character."

" I can't think better of you than I do, Barry. I love you with all my heart, and you know it; but it's natural I should hate anybody, living or dead, who'd come between me and you. And that's what he's done."

" What he might have done. But you can't say he has done it."

" That's your look-out."

" You know me," he said.

" I did; but sometimes I've felt of late I didn't know you so well as I used to. And that was his work."

" A man's mind gets bigger."

" Or smaller."

" It was funny to see the way my people took it. A good bit disappointed. Only one said she was glad—that was my mother. I felt dazed, but couldn't help marking them. Mother was proud; Uncle Nathan was floored; Aunt May kept her eyes on me, like the cat she is. Jimmy, who knows a bit about us, sat with his eyes and mouth both open, full of wonder."

" Barry," she said, " I'm not going to stand this, because it hurts too much. Things are changed—I know that. Life may come between a man and all that he thought and

planned to do. And I'd sooner die a hundred deaths than spoil your life. If I was to marry you, and you felt presently I'd stood between you and worldly prosperity and success and all that, I'd be a miserable creature so long as I lived. Money's power, and marriage often ain't. We've seen that. Marriage may be weakness and hinder a man, and come between him and what's best to him. I can't bring you a penny—only love and worship. And it's very likely now, standing where you stand, that you feel a doubt between such love and worship as mine and the power you're offered. Quite natural you should."

"What's all this about, Marian?"

"About your future. I love you better than your uncle did. Yes, I do. He wouldn't let you go free; but I do. With a thing like this happening, you must be free every way. I saw that the moment I heard about it. You're free as air from this moment. I'd rather never see you again than hamper you or come between you and anything you want. You know me well enough. I don't think about money like you do, though we thought the same once. But now it's yours, and I'd—in fact, I'm not too sure, even if it was different, that I'd love you rich. It cuts my power of usefulness away. Anyhow you must put me out of your mind over this job. I want you to be quite free. And no blame to you either."

He laughed at her earnestness.

"You silly thing! I daresay we'll have a bit of fun about this. But don't you say you're glad the old boy's dead. He had to be himself, like all of us. And he was a rare original. I shall miss him, because he had a way to impress himself upon the mind—same as moor stone does on your shins. Everything about him comes back to me—even the way he'd pull down his undervest because it had shrunk. And his hard, old grin. And his hatred of simple folk. He made common people shadows—such slight things they were alongside him. I don't say I want to be like him all round; but he was a lesson to get a grip on life and rise above everyday men."

"There's all sorts of ways of rising above everyday men, Barry."

"So there is, then—just like you rise above everyday women."

" I wish I could."

" You do. You have this minute. You're a rare girl, and I'm damned proud of you. Who but you would have said what you've said ? I know there's better things than money. I also know that you can buy most of them with money. But some you cannot. You've taught me that much. Give me a drink ; then I'll be gone. I've got to turn over a good few thoughts in my mind. You can't have your cake and eat it too. There's a choice between several ways for me now ; but no choice about one way. ' Free,' you say ? So I am. I've felt that strangely since he died. No man can let a dead hand hold him if he don't choose. A pretty chap I'd look with my six thousand pounds and farm and flocks and Uncle David's old paw on my throat ! "

She did not answer.

" Dry them eyes," he said, " or I'll kiss 'em dry."

In a few moments he was gone. The night had turned rough and wet, so he kept to the road and tramped home through Tor Royal. Clear of the sheltering woods a fierce wind beat upon him and the rain flogged his jacket. His thoughts drifted from himself to the dead. Never more would David trudge through wild weather, or shake the snow and rain from his whiskers. Never more would his high-pitched voice cut like a knife to the root of the matter ; never more would his great fist close on a coin. Barry had wit to wonder at his own fascination and speculate as to what subtle tie had drawn him, against his own honest conviction that his uncle's ideals were vain. He did not know and could not reach down to the secret string of heredity that had vibrated to David Mortimer — the unguessed predisposition that had responded to his mother's brother.

No shadows really clouded his purpose, so he told himself. There was no gold that would have rung true against Marian. But he desired gold also. It had not gone yet. It was his as long as he pleased to keep it. He amused himself with the idea of a long engagement—a plan to have his cake and eat it both. But how must Marian view such an enterprise ? Would it be necessary in any case to declare his betrothal ? And would a bare declaration at once vitiate the legacy ? Through his mind, like a fine

thread in coarse fabric, kept flashing the thought of Marian.

He reached Nun's Cross before midnight, to find that Jack and Jenny were gone to bed.

"I'm master—master of everything—and shan't I be master of myself?" he wondered.

He took off his boots, coat and trousers in the kitchen, set them before the peat fire to dry, and lighted a candle—one of his uncle's home-made dips.

Nobody would ever make any more of these now that David was dead. He was the last living man on the moor to do so. And Jenny would never go gathering the particular shell-snails that went to the Nun's Cross soup. These things belonged to the past, with a thousand other stints and thrifts. They had all been sound economies, but they would vanish with an ended reign.

"I'll do as he did as far as ever I can—while I'm here," determined Barry.

He was in bed and just about to blow out the candle when a thought came to him, and he rose and sought the black coat he had worn that morning. In the breast-pocket of the jacket was his uncle's letter, forgotten until that moment. He took it back to bed and opened the packet, to find half a dozen pages torn from an old ledger and closely written in David's clear, spidery caligraphy. He read till the candle went out; then rose and fetched another. Still he read, and, when the second dip expired, thrust the manuscript under his pillow and sat staring sleepless into the darkness for two hours.

There is no death, and a man cannot be childless if he would, for none dies who leaves nothing behind him. In measure of his quality he must tincture the human life that touched his spirit and bequeath an immortality of influence alike beyond mortal power to measure or resist. To have lived at all is to be imperishable, since never the least that passes but will stamp an impress upon some life to follow.

CHAPTER XXIV

NATHAN IS FIRM

A FORTNIGHT passed, and since Barry Worth proceeded with his work as usual and continued to conduct Nun's Cross much after the manner of his dead uncle, Nathan Mortimer and the rest of his relations concluded that he was prepared to abide by the stipulations and accept the legacy. The young man went on cheerfully with life and visited White Works now and again; but he did not discuss his affairs, and seemed more concerned with the future than the past.

Bascombe, going on a message to Barry's mother, declared, at her cross-questioning, that her son, while preserving an amiable attitude to life, was none the less much preoccupied.

"He's slipped into the master's seat as to the manner born," said Jack, "and we're all very well pleased at Nun's Cross, for 'twas a bit bleak with Mr. David; but we be thawing out under Mr. Barry. He's jealous for the old paths, you understand me, and says he'll be loyal to his uncle—'loyal' was his word—but there's more going on, no doubt, than you can see."

"What's going on?" asked Mary. "When he's here he won't speak of anything, except as to the farm and things that ought to be done if he stops there. But we can't feel exactly whether it's fixed in his mind that he stops."

"That's what Jenny says," answered Jack. "One minute you'd judge he was going to bide; then another minute, and he'll let drop something that makes you doubt it. He's restless, but he ain't worried or troubled. Whistles about—even plays. I guess it's the feeling he ain't got to work unless he pleases. He'll often take his gun now and be gone for a few hours and fetch back a grey hen, or rabbit."

"There's mystery all round me," confessed Mary,

" because the young generation takes one line and the old takes another. A very curious thing, Jack; and while my brother and his wife and my sister, Sarah, and me, not to mention Miss Pascoe and Charles, all feel pretty stiff that Barry will let the future take care of itself and abide by the terms of the will, yet his own brother and sister and Anstice Pascoe go against us and don't believe he's going to do it."

Jack considered.

" Terrible interesting, I'm sure. Me and my wife have thought of it also, and she's inclined to hold with your young people. She says all of Worth and Mortimer havage* have been famed for independence, and there's something about Mr. Barry leads her to believe he's going to give up the cash. She argues that he's cheerful and sleeps sound, for all his silences; and she also argues that if he'd meant to keep the money he'd have told me and her what he intended for us. Because, from the first, he held out that we should not be forgot if he could prevent it."

" I judge he'll want a month to make up his mind," said Mary; but she was mistaken. They next heard that Barry had been to Plymouth and stopped a night there; and when he returned, his uncle received a formal note inviting him to attend a family gathering at Nun's Cross on the following Sunday afternoon.

Barry had, in fact, decided upon his plan of action, and whatever the sources of his decision, once taken he appeared to win an immense deal of satisfaction out of it. He had always loved a jest, and found material for plenty at this stage in his affairs. He took life for the moment very lightly, and adopted a curious insensibility to his own actions that some regarded with enthusiastic praise, others were inclined to suspect might spring from causes concealed. The sequel, however, convinced the doubters that they were mistaken.

But Barry had his fun first, and it began with Marian. On the night of his return from Plymouth he met her by appointment, for she had planned to make some leisure for him. He carried a handbag, and as they strolled in the darkness by Tor Royal Wood and dropped to the

* *Havage* = Ancestry, descent.

valley beneath it, he at length began to talk. It was a question from her that loosed his tongue.

"I was glad to get your letter, Barry, though it said nought. Now I expect you've decided."

He made a strangely irrelevant reply.

"At Plymouth I had a look in the shops and found a wonderful useful invention. The things they invent are a caution. I've got it in my bag. I'll show it to you." He produced an electric torch, flashed it in her eyes and made her jump.

"Think what a handy thing on a dark night round about the place."

"So it is, then—wonderful! I've heard of them but never seen one."

He played it over her. He was boyish and full of high spirits.

"Yes, the shops are a proper wonder when you look at 'em understandingly. I never did before, but this time I did. I've got into a restful frame of mind, Marian. I see my way clear."

"I'm thankful to know that, Barry—very thankful indeed."

"And you'll be my friend—eh, Marian? You'll always be my true friend, won't you?"

She did not answer instantly. Yet his joyful manner indicated no reason for doubt. Not so, surely, would he have returned to tell her his decision if he had meant to break with her.

"Friend is a little word, but no doubt it means all. Yes, your friend always, Barry."

"Thank God for that, then."

He paused, then indeed he astonished her. He had given her a little silver ring set with one small pearl when they engaged themselves. She had worn it only when they met. Now he flashed his torch upon her fingers and saw that it was there.

"Marian," he said, "give me that ring, please."

The nightly world shook for her and the stars seemed to fall out of their places in heaven. She took off the trinket; but he did not torture her. The hand he extended for it held something else.

"Only an exchange," he said.

"There's no exchange for that, Barry," she answered very quietly.

"But there is, though. Hold the torch—steady. What's the matter with you? Good God, Marian—d'you mean you thought——?"

It was a cruel jest, born of something in the man—part of him; but it was only a jest.

Dazed and bewildered she held the torch, and under its bright eye he opened a little jewel box and showed her a ring with a diamond in it.

"A good exchange—eh?"

But she broke down and sobbed with his arms round her for a long time.

"I thought—I thought—" she kept saying, but could get no farther. He blamed himself, then blamed her.

"I'm a blasted fool," he said, "and so are you, Marian—yes, you are, I say. To think you didn't know me better. Be damned if I'll ever forgive you. D'you suppose I had to think twice about it? Good Lord—for six thousand pounds—or sixty thousand! I was only busy over what would come after. It's all been a tremendous lark—a tremendous lark, I'll swear. I'm as happy as a bird, and I'm going to have 'em all up at Nun's Cross, Sunday, and spring it on 'em. 'Twill be great fun to see their faces. I've thought it out, you see, and I shall strike while the iron's hot and get my share, too, with any luck; because when Uncle Nathan—but you'll see. A bit of a plot; but I know him, and there's only my Aunt May to fear. Not that I'm feared of her, neither. People grow soft afore a pile of ready money, and the thing is to remember what they say in the fullness of their hearts and pin them to it after, when they've cooled down."

He rattled on, and talked her into happiness again; but not complete happiness.

Little things stuck in her mind and she clung to them for the minute, because the great things seemed larger than her heart could hold.

"Give me my silver ring, Barry. I can't part with that. It means such a lot. Oh, Barry—a diamond. You didn't ought!"

"I'll always like the little, rubbishy one, too," he said. "Wear 'em both o' Sunday. No, don't put on the

diamond for the minute. That's only to show I was thinking of you at Plymouth. I'd like to have bought you a ship-load of braeelets and gold watches."

"What be they to me if you brought yourself back to me? I can't think of it now—'tis too great a thing. I'll just love you to-night, and not trouble about the morning. You've done what's fine for any man to do; and yet I won't even say that, because it belittles you."

They turned presently, and she promised to come to Nun's Cross on the following Sunday.

"And one thing, Marian. Never no hard words against my old man. You'll see things at Nun's Cross you'll hate, very like, and hear things from Jenny Bascombe that will make you want to cry out against him. But you mustn't. He meant well to me from his point of view, and I remember it."

"I'll keep him out of my thoughts all I can, Barry."

"I'm running on too fast. I talk of Nun's Cross; but time will show. We'll see on Sunday. Come over so soon as you can. We'll have a bit of fun with 'em."

"I'm frightened of that. Your mother will—what? I don't know."

"She'll be properly proud of you, and reckon I've got better than I deserve."

Marian laughed now for the first time.

"A mother of a man to think that? That would be something new!"

He left her presently and went his way. At home again he presented Jenny with a wonderful 'save all,' which he had bought at Plymouth, and Jack with a pipe in a case. Then he explained that his plans were made, and that his mother, uncle and aunt would hear them upon the following Sunday.

"What will come out of it for me and you people I don't know yet," he said, "but we haven't got long to wait."

He told them no more, heard the news of the farm, and went early to bed.

Upon the following Sunday, in obedience to Barry's wish, the elders arrived—three women and one man. May Mortimer resented this compliance with her nephew's direction. She grumbled still upon the way to Nun's Cross.

"Who's he to order his family about like a lot of servants? He ought to come to you, not send for you, and I'm a good bit astonished you and your sisters suffer it," she said, frowning upon the granite cross that rose above their heads as they approached the farm.

"I know," answered her husband. "You've told me the same before, my dear; but, because the younger generation throw over their manners, that's no reason why we should throw over them. We've got to suffer the young, whether we like it or not, and do our best for 'em—thankless though the task mostly is. You must use your understanding and think what this great thing means to Barry Worth. When you find yourself exalted, the common way is always to take the credit to yourself and be selfish about it. Money's like corn: the creature can't carry it very easy that ain't born to it."

"Then you must learn him," said May. "I'm tired of the subject, and don't know why the mischief he wants us up here again."

"More don't any of us—that's why we've come," answered Nathan.

They stopped for Mary and Sarah, and then all entered the farmyard together.

Barry was waiting and welcomed them at the door. The granite lintel over his head was whitewashed, that David might see his way when returning home on moonless nights.

"Come in!" he cried; "I thought you wouldn't mind having tea along of me this afternoon, because this was the place we heard the will, and this is the place where I ought to say what I've decided to do about it."

They entered, and found a peat fire in the parlour and chairs enough for all. Then, to their wonder, he gave them each a little parcel.

"'Tis nought," he said, "just a gift from Plymouth for friendship. I've been to see the lawyer. Don't open it, mother, till you get home. Ban't worth thanking for. Light your pipe, uncle."

They expressed their gratification in various shades of heartiness, then took their seats and waited for him to address them. Happiness and excitement marked his voice as he proceeded.

"Well, it's like this. The money's mine if I knuckle under to him who made it. But, as I happen to be engaged to a very fine girl, 'tis good-bye to the money."

The three women fluttered, but Nathan seemed suddenly turned to stone. He remained quite motionless, with his forefinger in the bowl of his pipe, which he was stuffing at the moment.

Mary it was who spoke. To her only one thing mattered.

"Who is it?" she asked. "Do I know her?"

"I'm coming to her. I said, you remember, that a girl would have to bring me more than six thousand if I threw up Uncle David's money. That was my fun, of course. She's worth far more than money to any man."

"Tell me who it is this instant moment. I will know!" exclaimed his mother.

"You just wait, my old dear. You'll know soon enough. But there it is, and the land lies like this. Uncle Nathan and Aunt Sarah and you each have two thousand pounds and a bit over, after all's paid, and you share all the things and the stuff here, and the balance of Nun's Cross lease—everything being personal property."

"All mine's yours, Barry," said his mother.

"No, no, that won't do. There's plenty of things you can better at home. I only want work at my time of life. The lawyer's going to write to each of you. I gave him particulars. He'll make it as simple as need be, and you'll have the money presently, or else the paper that stands for it, according as you wish."

"I hope he's an honest man," said Mrs. Mortimer.

"You can trust Uncle David there, Aunt May."

"Uncle David's dead," she answered. "And I hope there won't be no talk of paper—unless 'tis paper money. I don't hold with no paper."

Nathan spoke.

"Well, Barry, no doubt you've done the only thing you could do, and I'll say nothing about that, for there's nought to praise in putting your tokened maid above money. And I hope very heartily she's what you think her, as, no doubt, we all do."

"And now, perhaps, you'll tell us who it is," repeated his mother.

Barry, with his eye on the window which faced north, had already seen his sweetheart approaching.

"She'll tell you herself in two minutes," he answered. "She's sister's great girl friend—so now you know."

"Marian—Marian Dennis!"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"I wish you joy, nephew Barry," said Sarah.

"And I wish you joy, Aunt Sarah—and all of you joy. Your money's invested in very fine and valuable things; but you can sell out if you mind to. Only Mr. Square advises against."

"That's for your uncle to decide, Barry."

"Of course, Aunt May—no business of mine. I'm only telling you. Uncle David knew a bit about money, I believe; but I dare say Uncle Nathan knows more."

Mr. Mortimer was in a good temper.

He laughed and warned his nephew.

"Don't you poke your fun at me, Barry," he said.

"Not likely. The last I want to quarrel with. I'm in your hands now—you can make or mar me, you see. All here's yours, and if in your kind heart you can find a way to farm Nun's Cross and let a good money-making machine go on as it's going, I shall be very thankful and willing to stop here, with Jack Basecombe, as your tenant for the run of the lease under Duchy."

May looked suspicious, but it was her turn to feel proud. The centre of the stage would henceforth be occupied by her husband.

"It sounds all right," said Nathan. "We must talk about it."

"If I was up to the mark for Uncle David, why not for you?" asked Barry. "I know my job, and I'd a deal sooner work for you than anybody."

"Why not?"

"'Tis a very clever idea, Barry, and I hope your uncle will feel it so," said Mary.

"Then we should all bide nice and close together," added Sarah. "I be for it, I'm sure."

Barry left them for a moment and went to greet Marian.

Then Sarah said she was feeling faint and May Mortimer produced her little bottle of salts.

" Thank you, May," said Sarah, sniffing and somewhat tearful.

" 'Tis such a hugeous upheaval that it have given me a turn."

" No wonder," answered Mary, " but think of me ! "

Marian entered with Barry and the voices cackled very amiably. Mary now took the lead, but soon subsided and sat presently staring into the girl's face with all her eyes, while Barry talked. As for Marian, she could say nothing but utter earnest thanks for their welcome."

" You see," said the young man, " though it's a good bit ago we hitched up, we kept it dark for wisdom ; and lucky we did, else I should never have come here. Then, when Uncle David gave me a job and made me a farmer, we had to keep it closer than ever for a bit, till I got to be so valuable at Nun's Cross I could afford to let it out. But we're all for open dealing, Marian and me, naturally, and mighty glad to let everybody know about it."

Nathan, in his slow, synthetic way was reflecting, and presently he spoke to Marian.

" 'Tis funny, so seen, but we've got to thank you, young woman, for our legacies. That's how it pans out to the thinking mind, and so, all unknowing, when you made my nephew fall in love with you, you was upholding the ways of Providence and helping on justice and right."

" I'm very glad, I'm sure, Mr. Mortimer," murmured Marian. " But, all the same, it's a great grief to me to come between Barry and——"

" Cut that, Marian," said Barry. " You're doing nothing of the sort. Everybody knows about you and what you are ; and you know what you are to me."

Sarah and Mary were slightly tearful. Then Nathan spoke again to Marian.

" I'm sure you wasn't born to bring any man bad luck," he said. " I know the meaning of a human face very clever, and you're one of the good ones and shall be welcome in my family."

" So you shall, then," declared Mary. " And thank God 'tis some one I know about ; and no better woman than your mother walks, Marian."

" And no better man than my father," declared Marian.

"You can tell your folk we're pleased about this," directed Mr. Mortimer.

"And you can tell 'em that Uncle Nathan's going to decide if we shall be married or not pretty spry," added Marian's lover.

"All's well that ends well, I'm sure," said May Mortimer sharply; "and that lets us out, then, don't it? The air's getting a bit close in here. My smelling salts, Sarah, please."

"You've got to stop to tea, else there'll be waste," said Barry. "We keep old rules about wasting nothing—too well drilled for that. Jenny's ready, I reckon."

A little diplomacy followed, and Barry won. His purpose was to see his uncle alone for a moment; and Mrs. Mortimer divined it and strove against him. But as they drifted to the kitchen Nathan's nephew begged his uncle to look at a new-born calf and took him out into the farmyard.

"There ain't no calf," he said a moment later, "but I'm cruel wishful to hear as you'll let me work for you here. Just a word, for your word's so good as your bond. You can't relinquish the lease, for that's to throw away a lot of good money, and you can only farm your place, and this as well, if you put in a man here. And why not me? I know my job all right."

"Us'll have a tell to-morrow."

"Now—now—why not now? I shall be terrible hurt if you say 'no.' And you can turn me out any time if I don't please you. For my mother's sake, uncle—you know what it would be to her. She and Aunt Sarah both want me to stop."

Nathan was thinking entirely of his wife.

"There's times when you ought to be firm and times when you can very well give way," he remarked.

"Give way, then," urged Barry, ignorant of the matter in his uncle's mind.

Nathan laughed, perceiving the other's misunderstanding. As Barry with Marian, so he, from ghostly streak of character that had taken its supreme flesh and form in dead David, was for a moment cruel.

"No," he said, "I'm going to be firm, Barry."

"You won't agree—why? It's a damned unsporting thing if——"

"There—there! I do agree. You shall have the farm—my word on it!"

The younger rejoiced, expressed hearty gratitude and promised to reward Mr. Mortimer.

"I'll surprise you," he said. "There's a lot to this place. It ought to be good for very near as much clear profit as your two thousand pounds will bring."

"We shall see about that. I'm a fair man and shan't grudge you your share."

They took tea together and Marian was the centre of attention. All were cheerful now and full of talk, save Sarah, who appeared to be overweighted with her good fortune. Already she was speculating uneasily as to its significance in the simple scheme of her existence.

They went home presently. Sarah and her sister started first; then followed Nathan and Mrs. Mortimer two minutes later. Barry had promised to go to supper with his mother, but first intended to see Marian back to Princetown.

May was uneasy and inquisitive as she and her husband returned to White Works.

"What was you up to with him outside?" she asked, and Nathan explained that he had agreed to Barry's wish.

"I read your eye before tea; but there's times to be firm and times to be easy, May," he began, "and, in a word, this was a time to be firm. You mustn't say nothing against my purpose, and 'tis wasted words if you do, because he's got my promise. And, come to think of it, why not?"

"Promised! And never a word with me about it first. And you say 'why not?' And I say 'why should you?' I never liked him, and when I don't like a man there's always good reason, as you've granted often enough when time showed I was right."

"You don't like either of my nephews for that matter, nor yet their mother, nor yet their aunt."

She brought out her smelling bottle.

"I felt it to be my duty," he continued, "and my duty will do. He's earned our goodwill—yours, too—even if

he didn't have it before. This rumpus means something in sight of two hundred a year for us. Keep that in mind."

"You ought to have asked me, Nathan; and you didn't because you knew I wouldn't agree with you."

"A damned good reason, my dear. I couldn't have looked his mother in the face again if I'd turned him down —nor yet him either. 'Twas clearly right and fair. He knows the place and the work, and he's clever and he wants to be married. And—and—you had your way over Anstice, and——"

He stopped, but Mrs. Mortimer did not speak. She sniffed and smelt at her salts. Outwardly she appeared to be placid again by the time they returned home.

Allusion to Anstice had silenced her, because she knew that the life of her daughter was a failure.

CHAPTER XXV

JAMES PARDONED

A FEW weeks later Sarah came to see Mary, on Sunday afternoon, about a difference of opinion. The latter had a wish to take the empty house in the block—the house that separated her home from Sarah's. None knew why Mary had developed this ambition, or desired to spend part of her newly-acquired wealth on doing so futile a thing; but she satisfied herself that it was an excellent idea, full of possibilities. They argued, and Sarah reminded her sister that nobody supported her.

"Damaris will be married very soon now and you'll want less room instead of more, and 'tis a proper rogue's roost of a place and will cost pounds to put in order."

"You don't want me next door to you—that's the truth," answered Mary.

"You oughtn't to say that—such friends as we've always been since girls. And Lord knows I've got quite enough on my mind as 'tis without this," sighed Sarah. "More papers come this morning, and I can't make top nor tail of 'em. I've got to sign here, there and everywhere, and get somebody to be witness to my writing. 'Tis the most complicated torment, and more than I can well put up with."

"I know. And not a penny of money—that's the queer thing. All documents and trouble, seemingly."

"We shall be in our graves afore we lay hold on a sovereign of it—just when we want it, too," said Sarah. "Here's the two weddings in sight, and I'm wishful to make 'em both a good present. But Barry says, again and again, I mustn't touch the capital."

"I know. That's his one word on the subject to me also."

"To hear him you'd think 'twas gunpowder, or something. I'm sure I wake up of a night in a bath of perspira-

tion, saying to myself 'mustn't touch the capital,' 'mustn't touch the capital.' "

"Take care it don't get on your nerves," said Mary. "Nathan bids us to be patient. 'Tis only a question of time. We shall have it afore the weddings, I believe. 'Tis very near in sight."

"I want for to give James a good gift, too," said Sarah. "And then there's Anstice—she must have something to cheer her up. She's terrible down-daunted now-a-days."

"Let be about 'em. Anstice don't want money. Think of yourself. Sometimes Barry wonders whether me and you wouldn't be more comfortable in Princetown now we're getting up in years. 'Tis well within our reach, of course, if we like to go in them new houses."

"I don't go," said Sarah. "To move would be the last straw, I'm sure. My mind wouldn't stand it. Besides, I don't want to go away. There's quite enough company here, and I'd be lost in a great, noisy place like Princetown."

"You'd have a lot more comforts, however. That's why I thought we might rent the house between us. We should have a number of useful spare rooms."

"Rooms ain't useful if you've got nothing to put in 'em," said Sarah irritably.

"But you'll be buying some more furniture, I suppose."

"And if I do? I've got lots of room in my house; and so will you have when Damaris is married."

"I shall have a servant then."

"Did you get a petition axing for money for the lifeboats?"

"I did, and one for blind people; and Barry said I was to take no notice and tear 'em up. He said a lot of people will come begging now we're rich, and we must harden our hearts against 'em and not begin doing it."

Sarah sighed again and cleaned her spectacles.

"'Tis anxious work," she said. "I wouldn't say we ought to tear up the paper about the lifeboats. I've got mine on my mantelshelf, so as I shan't forget. And then to church, only last Sunday, the Reverend Forbes said it would be very good and seemly thing if everybody was to give a tenth part of all they had to the Lord. And I felt he was talking for me alone and knew that all eyes were on me. And then, as a sort of answer to the

Reverend Forbes, I heard Barry's words, 'Don't touch the capital.'"

"I hope the people will mind their own business. Barry's right, and a tenth part, no doubt, be all very proper for the upper people—not for us. Do the Reverend Forbes give a tenth part? No; he takes it. We'll do our duty, and that's enough for us."

"What is our duty?" asked Sarah, and Mary declared that it would be shown to them.

"The Lord have willed us to have the money," she said, "and the Lord will help us to spend it or save it, according what's right."

"Would the Lord say, 'Don't touch the capital'? That's the question in my mind," murmured Sarah.

"What with the writing and signing and worry, us will soon come to feel we've fairly earned the money," declared Mary. "In fact, I do now. At first it seemed a great feat to have it; but 'tis amazing how soon you get used to an idea. I wake up now just as usual, without feeling anything wonderful have happened."

"I wake up calm and then begin to worrit," confessed Sarah, "and I worry all day till I unray and dout the candle and get to bed again."

"'Tis narrow-minded, and you should take this great come-by-chance in a higher spirit, Sarah."

"I shall give half a crown to they lifeboats, whether or no," answered her sister. "There can't be no wrong in that, and it would pleasure me to do so."

James, Benjamin Halfyard and Damaris joined them presently. They returned together from Princetown, and Damaris was full of the weddings.

"Marian's people are very pleased for her and me to be married same day, and Ben likes the thought, too, don't you, Ben?"

"I do," said Mr. Halfyard. "We shall kill two birds with one stone. And I tell Barry that he needn't give us no wedding present and us needn't give him none."

Certain details of Barry's position at Nun's Cross had just been announced, and James did not approve them.

"Barry won't have any too much money," he said. "Uncle Nathan's drove rather a hard bargain, he reckons."

"It wasn't Uncle Nathan," answered Mary. "He

couldn't have done anything mean. We all know who pulls the strings when Uncle Nathan dances."

"You oughtn't to say that before the younger generation, Mary," declared her sister; but Damaris supported her mother.

"Why not, Aunt Sarah? We've all got eyes in our heads. I'm sure I was surprised Barry had leave to stop at Nun's Cross at all."

"He wouldn't have if he hadn't rushed it," said James. "He got Uncle Nathan to agree before he knew where he was."

"As to money," declared Benjamin, "Barry may or may not have the stuff; but he's got big ideas and ain't frightened of spending a bit, even if he's got to borrow it first. What d'you think? He's going for his honeymoon to London."

"And why not?" asked Mary. "He'll have plenty. I've give him a wedding present of twenty-five pounds, same as I have Damaris."

"I'm not saying he hasn't a right to go. I'm only showing how large his ideas are," explained Mr. Halfyard.

"We all know that," said James. "He was always very wishful to see London, and now he will."

"Damaris ain't," answered Ben. "Of course, if she was, I'd make the journey on her account."

"I'm not," declared Damaris. "I'm like Aunt Sarah: I don't like towns."

"Have you decided where you shall go?" asked Sarah.

"Bude, like Anstice did, I shouldn't wonder," answered her niece. "Benjamin likes the sea for a change, don't you, Ben?"

"Your word's law," he answered. "'Twill be change enough for me being married. Why the first fortnight of married life should be spent in idleness, I never understand."

James left them, for he had an appointment to keep. When he had gone Benjamin spoke of him.

"These here weddings are bucking up James," he said. "He's more like himself to-day—very near half-way to cheerfulness, you might say."

"'Tisn't the weddings," replied Damaris, "though he's pleased about them, of course."

" I hope they'll lead him to higher and better thoughts," said Sarah. " If James could only find the right one, us old people would feel the next generation was provided for."

" He'll never marry," asserted Mary. " I know him too well. And what's making him a happier man for the minute is that Charles Pascoe's forgiven him. Not that there was ought to forgive; but after that silly walk in the dark—you know. And now the past is to bury the past—that's what Charles says—and knowing very well that James is a good influence on Anstice and cheers her up a lot, he's asked my son to tea. And that's why he's pretty bobbish this afternoon."

" Have you changed your mind about the empty house next door, mother ? " asked Mr. Halfyard.

She had not, and they were trying for the twentieth time to prove the futility of her project when James returned.

He wanted their advice.

" I've got a box of candied fruits in my pocket," he said. " 'Tis for Anstice, but would you think there's a danger in giving it to her ? "

" Don't you do it," advised Sarah. " Give it to Damaris and let her give it to Anstice to-morrow from you. You must be terrible witty to-day, James. 'Tis a great thing being allowed to see her at all."

" More shame that it should be," added Mary.

James relinquished his box instantly; but there was something in his coat pocket he did not relinquish and did not mention.

" Anstice be a good bit under the weather, I'm afraid," said Damaris, " though it will brighten her up something wonderful to have a tell with you, Jimmy."

When he had gone his mother spoke.

" There's a lot of cunning in them Pascoes. I see through it, however. They've congratulated us on our fortunes, of course; but behind was a bit of jealousy, as Rebecca couldn't hide. And they look on ahead and, no doubt, think Anstice will gain by it some day, or, if she don't, her child will."

" You oughtn't to say such things, Mary," answered Sarah. " Indeed, you didn't ought. Charles was greatly

pleased to hear about me and shook my hand, and he said same as Barry did. 'Don't you touch the capital, Miss Mortimer,' he said to me. 'Tis evidently a very vital point, for all men think alike on it."

"Men as might be interested in it themselves, you'll observe," said Ben.

"Don't look as if anybody was going to touch anything," grumbled Damaris. "There's such a lot of messing about and letter-writing."

"The law's like that," explained her sweetheart, "slow and sure. You ladies mustn't be in too much of a hurry."

Meantime James appeared at Strane Steps and found himself welcome. Charles, indeed, proved almost cordial. "If I'd some money come to me, too, he couldn't have been friendlier," thought James.

Anstice was delighted to see him, but concealed the full extent of her pleasure. She was ailing and in the doctor's hands. James noticed, too, a change in her husband.

Mr. Pascoe had lost a little more hair, the visitor thought: he had also lost somewhat of that placid expression none could fail to mark as a feature of his countenance. He was, it seemed, slightly anxious, and while pleasant enough in an abstracted sort of fashion, none the less exhibited a trace of moodiness that sat strangely upon him.

They drank tea, and Anstice inquired concerning the arrangements for the weddings.

"Us old married people always take interest in such things," she said.

"I hope it will be a triumphant affair," answered James. "They are all in a hurry and want to be married at Easter, if not sooner."

"Barry's very pleased about stopping at Nun's Cross, I expect?"

"He is, then. And Marian likes it, too. 'Twill be a very different world up there in the future."

"And I hope a world not without proper thought and attention paid to the next," said Rebecca Pascoe. "Go on eating, Anstice. You must let down some more food. I promised doctor."

"It is a solemn thing when a man is cut off in his sleep;

and doubly solemn when he is not a good man," declared Charles. " I hope the death of your uncle has touched up the conscience of more than one among us."

" It's done a lot of things," answered James. " It's rather curious to look at people who have come into money, Charles, and it's also curious to look at other people watching them. So far as I can see, while everybody says they are ever so pleased, I won't be sure they really are. 'Tis almost as if human nature can't see good fortune falling to others without a bit of a secret pang."

" How can you, Jimmy ! " cried Anstice. " That's a horrid thing to think—not like you at all."

" It is horrid and outside charity," admitted James, " yet I believe it's true. One man's luck is always bound to be a fly in the honey-pot of somebody else, seemingly. I only say what I can't help noticing."

" It's perfectly true and a very sad fact," declared Charles. " Even the nice people find the good fortune of their friends uninteresting, and the people of mean nature actually suffer jealousy. It is only such as we are, in this house, that can feel the highest satisfaction at such moments. I do not care to think how all that money was made—the less said about that the better, James ; but I hope that it will do nothing but good in the future for those who have the handling of it now. That is, of course, if doubtful money is allowed to do good."

" If it ain't honest money, it won't do good to nobody," prophesied Miss Pascoe.

" The money itself can't be dishonest, surely ? " asked James.

" The money can't," admitted Charles; " but no good ever comes of money that was made outside of plain dealing. That's the will of Higher Hands, and I've often seen it happen."

" People take money different, I find," continued James. " Money wants a lot of practice, I think, to handle it clever."

" It does, James ; and with money, like everything else, all depends on the point of view. If you look at money as a form of pleasure and indulgence, it worries you ; but if you look at it as a duty, then it don't. You ought to

ask yourself, not whether you are getting all you can out of it, but whether you are doing all you can with it."

"Good, Charles," said Rebecca.

"I don't know, I'm sure," answered James. "Aunt Sarah be only full of her duty, but the money's worrying her like hell before she's seen a penny of it. We're all wondering, on the quiet, whatever she will do when it comes along. She's got a sort of reckless feeling to part with the lot, for her peace of mind."

"To whom?" asked Charles.

"Her relations—me and Barry and Anstice and Damaris."

Anstice laughed.

"Just like her! I'll tell her I won't have none, for one," she said.

"I beg you'll tell her no such thing, my dear," responded her husband. "I have already urged Miss Mortimer to do nothing rash or wilful. Two thousand pounds is a very large sum of money. We must save Miss Mortimer from herself in this matter. The small mind, like hers—I say it quite kindly, of course—is apt to be upset by any sudden responsibility. But that will wear off, probably. And if it doesn't, and she wants to escape that responsibility—then—however, let us change the subject. I don't care about discussing money of a Sunday."

"Eat a bit more, Anstice," said James. "If the doctor says you must eat, then you ought to do it."

"I've made a big tea—a lot bigger than usual," declared Anstice.

In his pocket James had a little letter for her, and he hoped it might be possible to convey it to her hand unseen before he departed. Much to his surprise, however, that happened which made intrigue needless.

"I was thinking, perhaps, after tea you'd like a little walk with Anstice, James," said Mr. Pascoe humbly. "It would be good for her, such a fine evening, if she went a mile or so and give her an appetite to her supper."

The younger felt a pang of guilt. Instantly he suffered secret shame. He had been plotting, and remorse was his reward.

"And very pleased, I'm sure, if Anstice likes. We might just go up over and back."

"Thank you," answered Charles. Then he rose and left them, while Rebecca explained a little.

"You see what your husband is, Anstice. Always thinking for you. He planned this because he wanted for you to have something to pleasure you; and he also wanted James to know he was forgiven. That's my nephew."

"Dear Charles," said Anstice, her eyes full of happiness. "It's just like his kindness, I'm sure. I'll go and dress."

They set off together presently, happy in each other's company for a little while. Then gloom descended upon them. James was incapable of hiding his own present discomfort.

"Nothing's ever right," he said. "There's always some fate hanging over me. You'd think this would have been a blessed moment, Anstice; and yet it ain't."

"It is for me," she said. "To get a bit of talk and hear about you."

"I wouldn't cast you down, then, for the world. But, though he little knew it, Charles properly stabbed me just now."

"Never! I didn't hear him."

"He didn't mean it—far from that. But 'twas my own act turned his kindness into pain. I'm that cunning and crafty where you're concerned. It wasn't enough but I just come at his invite, content to hear about you and look in your face; but I must be plotting. I'd got a letter for you with a plan to meet you presently, and I was going to slip it in your hand unbeknownst if I got a chance."

"How lovely! Let me have it."

"Not now. He's cut the ground from under me and made me feel a crafty creature. So good is he that he makes other people feel bad, and never knows it. He's spoiled the evening for me."

"Don't say that. Be bright, Jimmy, and cheer me up. I want cheering. Charles is amazing good, as you say; but he's not too happy, I'm afraid."

"You must be happy if you're good. If I hadn't writ that letter and been sly I should be happy now—a lot happier than I am, I mean."

"Charles—but us needn't talk of him. I fret him,

because I can't hide myself. I'm terrible tired and weak sometimes and can't hide it, and he worries how to make me stronger; and sometimes he'll let out a bit and lose his temper. And I'm always so sorry for him when he does, because I know how he hates doing it."

"He's only human. I don't bear him no wicked feeling no more; but if he finds life ain't all he thought, I can't feel particular sorry for him."

"I do often feel sorry, and then sometimes, when he gets hard, I look back and ain't sorry at all. Anyway I don't think—but tell me about yourself. I'm not going to grumble. If we go back in the hour, and I'm cheerful and eat my supper properly, he'll see 'twas a clever thing to let us go walking, and very like do it again. So you must cheer me up, dear Jimmy."

"You're looking ill—yes, you are. There's no nature in you."

She could only walk very slowly, and he had noticed it.

"I worry," she said. "I don't worry for myself, because I know what I want; but I worry for them—Charles and his aunt."

"You didn't ought to worry for them. You've done all you could for them."

"So I have, then; but I very well know it isn't what they expected and hoped. They thought I'd soon be turned to their pattern, and I tried to be in their pattern, but I'm not such a soft piece as everybody thought. I can't be all they want, not from want of trying, but because I'm myself. And you come back to yourself sometimes."

"And what to God should they want different from yourself? He married you, didn't he—not a lump of clay that wanted mauling to make it different from the lovely thing it was?"

"I expect all men see points about their own woman they think, on the quiet, they'll change presently. And sometimes they do, and then the woman is miserable; and sometimes they don't, and then the man is."

"That's marriage," said James. "That's what mostly happens. But if we'd been married—we shouldn't have wanted to change nothing."

"In my case I wanted to change," confessed Anstice.

" I said to myself, ' I won't be what James wanted : I'll be different.' I had a queer feeling that I'd not let anybody have what you'd have had, but try to be another woman—one you wouldn't have cared about. I thought it would make you happier, somehow, if you saw me different from what you had loved. And I thought I'd succeeded. Yes, I did—I quite deceived myself for a time ; but I didn't deceive Charles. I ain't religious-minded enough for Charles."

" You'd have been religious-minded enough if you'd married me. But 'tis all very well for him to be religious—he's got what he wants. Any fool can thank God when things go right; and only a fool would thank Him when things go wrong."

" He hasn't got what he wants," declared the girl. " I know very well indeed he hasn't got what he wants, and I'm very sorry for him. And he's getting very sorry for himself."

" More shame to him, then."

" 'Tis natural. I fall short. Anybody could have told him I should. Mother could have told him ; father could have told him. But none spoke and said ' the woman who loves James Worth can't be the woman for Charles Pascoe.' Nobody said it but me. I said it again and again, but he wouldn't believe me."

" I'm properly desperate when you tell me such things."

" No, no ; don't you worry. I'm only explaining. I've got a sort of feeling that some day you'll open his eyes, poor chap. I'm quite fond of him in a funny sort of way. I want to please him so much. I pray to God hearty enough, though he thinks I'm not religious-minded. I pray and pray that I may bring him a boy. He'd find it a lot easier to put up with me if that happened, and if it was a nice child and grew up in his own pattern."

" And what if it ain't a boy ? Surely the man wouldn't visit that on you ? "

" No, he wouldn't ; but I'd visit it on myself."

They murmured together under the stars. Then she said that she was very tired and must turn homewards. She hoped that they might see each other again, and he prayed her to show cheerfulness when she returned.

" I'll be cheerful myself next time," he said, " but

with one thing and another I was cast down. I can't pretend along with you, though I do with the rest of the people."

"I'll tell you a lot more I'm thinking next time I see you," she promised. "And I shall be as bright as a star to-night and show Charles what a clever thing he thought on."

Instantly James was anxious.

"Don't overdo it, however. Don't start him into no jealousies again. He's got over that; but if it's in him to be jealous and mistrust such a man as me——"

"No, no; I'll just do the right thing."

Elsewhere Mr. Pascoe and his aunt held speech together. She sat with her feet on the parlour fender, and he walked up and down with his hands in his pockets. It was significant that he should walk up and down, for the action showed certain modifications of his old self-control. There had, indeed, been a time when he deprecated restlessness of body as indicating unevenness of mind.

Rebecca Pascoe had become attached to Anstice almost despite herself. She knew well enough now that her nephew's cares were increased by marriage to a greater extent than his happiness; but she could not honestly blame either party to the contract, and was too intelligent to mistake the transparent purity of the girl's life and the honest efforts she exerted to be all things possible to her husband. Her health had grown to be the present uneasiness.

"It was a noble idea to let 'em go for a walk, and you'll be paid for it," said Rebecca. "Nobody but a clever man would have hit on that."

"It was your idea," he said. "I shouldn't have thought of it. I'm not sure, now, if it isn't a dangerous experiment. We can't hide the truth from our own minds, because we've always lived in the light of it, and always shall. And the ray of truth tells us that I made a mistake when I married my wife."

She gasped, for never in all his days had he admitted an error to her ear until that moment.

"Don't say it and don't think it, Charlie. You're far ways from yourself when you let that slip. 'Tis no ray of truth, but just passing human weakness that makes

you talk so. She's a dear, good girl—as good as you'd find—and she loves you with her whole heart."

"I believe that now. Yet—there it is—the obstinate shadow of that slight man. I'm too wise to mistake. I shouldn't dislike such a person as James if I didn't know he was lessening my high principles."

"Never! Nothing could do that. If the poor creature has got it in his power to improve her appetite, then you're doing right to let him see her. What we have to think of is her health and the unborn. When once she's all right, with a nice babe to tend, everything will run smooth."

He admitted this.

"As I've always said, and proved, nothing happens that isn't for the best in the long run. Yet sometimes, to my surprise, I find myself going back on that. It shows a weakness in me."

"Don't blame yourself no more, for I won't hear it," she answered. "You're not the sort to come to grief. The Lord looks after his own, Charles, and a man that's lived your life is about as safe as mortal can ever hope to be—even in marriage."

They talked together, and waited with deep interest to see in what spirit Anstice would come home.

Both were gratified to find her cheerful. She thanked her husband for his consideration.

"Jimmy's a good bit downcast," she said, "but I cheered him up and told him he'd have to look out for a wife himself, now all the rest of us are suited so well."

"I'd go round the earth to find the girl, if I knew where she bided," declared Miss Pascoe.

CHAPTER XXVI

MARY HEARS WISDOM

It is a question whether those who, anticipating sad changes, discount them, and so feel their pain before the event, suffer less than the unimaginative, who do not look into the future and lack power to taste the future until it becomes the present.

James was of the sort who foresee where tribulation must fall, and he had been schooled in this mournful prudence by his own sorrows. He reminded his mother that he had warned her of altered circumstances when, on the day after the double weddings, she lamented.

"I know she's happy and did ought to be full of joy and gladness," said Mary, while she and her eldest son sat at breakfast together, "but so heavy is my heart, now all the excitement is over, and so terrible sad I feel, along of knowing Damaris be gone for good, that 'tis almost more like as if she was buried than wedded. And it often do happen, from a mother's point of view, that she might as well bury her child as marry her—we all know that. This place without Damaris—'twas bad enough when Barry went; but now."

"I know," said James, "and I warned you time and again to soak in the thought before she went. If you'd done that, and kept the picture of the home in your mind—however, you've got me, and you'll always have me, and I'm going to make a good effort to be a cheerfuller sort of man for your sake."

"Like you wish to be, James. But you can't change your nature. I shall get used to it. And there's a lot to be thankful for, though I must smart a good bit at first, and I'm just beginning to find out how much. Damaris was no ordinary girl, any more than you and Barry are ordinary boys. Such children spoil a mother."

"She won't be far off—that's a cheerful thought;

and be sure there's great prosperity in store for her and Barry, too."

"I hope so."

"All the same, you must look ahead in a seasoned spirit and not be building too much on everything falling dead right. One thing balances against another, and averages always tell in the long run. I heard Mr. Edwards say that, and it's a deep thought. Take me and Barry and Damaris and our love affairs. Well, I fell in love first and my adventure was so fearful that there was every reason to hope Barry and Damaris would restore the law of average and come out well. And I believe they will."

"You've thought it out, I see, James."

"Oh, yes. I've never got anything to think about but other people now, because there's nothing more to my own life than a leaf on a tree. I don't even interest myself now. How could I? But of course, after Anstice, Barry and Damaris interest me most; and then Marian and Benjamin. Damaris is all right, for her husband has got a lot of sense and a kind heart, and you needn't fear for her. They're safe. But Barry's a much bigger-minded man than Ben. He's got brains, and he's one of the soaring sort. I hope Marian will understand that and not keep him back."

"That's pretty much what I feel, but your Uncle Nathan don't. He's a little doubtful about Barry, and rather looks forward to Marian steadying him down."

"I know," answered James. "So does Charles feel like that. They watch Barry with the eyes of the older generation and doubt him, because they see in him a larger pattern of man than themselves and a man with larger ideas. That makes them a bit uncomfortable. And so they hope that marriage will put the drag on. I daresay they had larger ideas themselves once; and in Uncle Nathan's case, as we all know, marriage did put the drag on, because he married a beast of a woman."

"You mustn't say that. I don't like your Aunt May no more than you do; but no doubt she's a good wife according to her lights."

"Well, I hope Marian will see life from Barry's point of view, because he's got the stronger will."

"Marian's got a strong will, too, and a lot of woman

sense that will be useful to Barry. Barry's going it—so your uncle says."

"And so Charles said last Sunday at tea; and why shouldn't Barry go it? Every young man ought to go it, I should think, or try to, anyway. Charles seemed to be doubtful of the wisdom of taking in that bit of new ground at Nun's Cross and buying the new sheep and new cart, and so on. He said Barry mustn't run before he'd learned to walk. The old, when they're past running, always say that to the young; but it's nonsense. Run while you can, I should think. Nobody knows better what he's about than Barry. Uncle Nathan will get all his money right enough. It's only a starting point for Barry. By the time Nun's Cross lease runs out, he'll be strong enough to take it over himself—or go somewhere better."

"So he says. I hope he's not running into debt, or anything like that."

"He's not," declared James, "for the best of reasons. Nobody would trust him without security, and he's got nothing behind him yet."

Still Mrs. Worth was doubtful.

"I live in hope," she said. Then her son prepared to go to work and Sarah came in from her house. The empty cottage still stood between the homes of the sisters, for the family had argued Mary out of her desire to rent it.

Sarah also suffered from anti-climax. She was looking older, and people said her money had aged her, as though it had been a trouble.

"I can't believe that it is all over, and they're wedded and gone," she said.

"More can't I; but I soon shall. To think of home without Damaris be dreadful to me. James warned me long ago, but I never grasped what it was going to be."

"I can feel for you a lot there, and, in a smaller degree, I'm faced with a sad change, too," answered Sarah moodily.

"You! What can happen to you?"

"Jane Bond's given notice."

"Never!"

"She have. I spared you till after the wedding, because I knew how vexed you'd be for me."

" I am, then ; but it's always the way. They will marry. and never know when they're well off."

" It's Barry's work, in truth," explained Sarah, " and I shan't forgive him too quick. You see she was tokened to Little Jack, but no talk of marrying for a good few years. But now Barry's been after Little Jack. He wants him back at Nun's Cross, knowing his worth, and he's offered him to come back and bring Jane to help Mrs. Bascombe. So there it is, they're to be married presently, and Farmer White, at Frog End, be properly savage with Barry for kindidling Little Jack away from him."

" I'm sure it was all honest and open," said her sister. " But I'm sorry for you. However, you must get another. I've got one, though it wasn't easy. They don't like it out here—too lonely. I only came by a girl because her young man's thrown her over and she wishes she was dead for the minute and don't care about the loneliness. I dare say she will give notice as soon as she feels better."

" I know what it will be," said Sarah. " They all hear I'm rich now, and they'll ask too much."

" Everybody's like that. Even the shops put it on. Everybody wants to get their bit of it. I never knowed what a grasping lot they was to Princetown till I came into that money."

" So they are," said Sarah. " Thank God, I've got rid of a bit over the wedding presents."

" You was a lot too generous. I've never thanked you ; but you know what I feel about it."

" Let them have it as know what to do with it," replied Sarah. " We was just what you might call comfortably poor afore this windfall—we had enough to live on and not enough to worry about ; and, so far as I can see, that's the most gracious state you can be called to. But them that has too much and them that has too little be in the same fix : they're both called to worry themselves to fiddlestrings. When I had my pound a week, I knew where I was ; now I've got three pound a week, I don't."

" You'll get used to it quicker than you'd think. Don't be small-minded about it. The weddings have cost me a fortune, and 'twill take two quarters, I shouldn't wonder, before I'm straight."

" Come to me, then," said Sarah. " I've got ten pound

yet as I shan't touch. My only pleasure now will be to save for the next generation. You'll be a grandmother and me a great-aunt, I dare say, in a year's time."

"A great-aunt you'll certainly be, and me, too, pretty quick," answered Mary. "They've axed you to be godmother to Anstice's child, I hear."

"Charles asked me and, God forgive me, the first thought in my mind was that they wouldn't have asked me if it hadn't been for the legacy. 'Tis hateful to be so suspicious. I never was before."

"Don't you blame yourself, Sarah. Human nature can't change because you've got a windfall. It's quite natural Charles Pascoe should like to interest an old woman like you in his coming child. You mustn't blame him for it, and you mustn't blame yourself for seeing through him. They might have asked you in any case, for you are Anstice's favourite."

"James is hankering to be man-gossip to the infant," said Sarah, "but, from what he tells me, I don't think it will be allowed to happen."

"James is so simple," sighed Mary. "He judges others by himself and reads into words their plain, honest meaning. He don't allow for Charles's feelings about Anstice exactly. All very friendly for the minute; but it can't go on."

"I suppose it can't. 'Tis a plot in a way. The Pascoes know that James can cheer up Anstice as none else can, and that his company's better for her than all the doctor's caucheries. So they encourage James; but when the child be born, and all is well, I am afraid they may cold-shoulder James again, and that will hurt him a lot."

"Not as much as you might think," answered the mother of James. "I will say for James that, simple and trusting as he is in many things, he's got a great gift of looking on ahead and seeing trouble before it comes. He often knows what's going to happen in a very curious way, and so he escapes more than some of us. I can't say as ever he sees happy things in sight afore they happen, but he's a mark on forlorn and difficult ones. And that's the sort do come oftenest."

"His sorrows quicken him, poor chap."

"Yes, and he knows very well when Anstice has

got a baby, the child will come first and take the place of all else for her. And, no doubt, Charles expects the same."

"I wish she'd look forward with a better heart, however," said Sarah. "She's got no spirit in her, and don't care how it goes. That's bad for a coming mother."

"Keep her in your prayers. We can't do more than that."

"Of course May's a good deal put about behind the scenes, I fancy."

"I don't care how much she's put about. Anstice would have took James and been a happy woman but for her. The sins of the mother be visited on the daughter—as usual."

"She's been a good wife to Nathan."

"How d'you know that? I wouldn't go so far. No man's got more hid than Nathan, in my opinion."

"Well, the money's lightened his load, that's one good thing. He goes easier on his feet and is oftener to Princetown among the people."

They talked on and lightened each other's minds until they parted with a little laughter.

CHAPTER XXVII

AT NUN'S CROSS

Marian found her new life with her husband abound in surprises. She discovered presently that his regard for money was great. He attached high importance to it and implicitly led her to appreciate the fact, even during their honeymoon. Thrown into the closest communion with him, opportunities to study her husband she gladly accepted, and from the perception of this very real preoccupation in his mind, Marian reached two discoveries, one attractive and one disturbing. She understood now that Barry certainly loved her with keen and devoted intensity; his interest in and affection for money showed that indirectly, and revealed to her that what from the ordinary lover's standpoint had not been a sacrifice, to Barry must have been. It was a sordid thought, that by six thousand pounds his affection had been tried; yet, in the new knowledge springing from married intercourse, she guessed it was so. But Marian had experience and a natural genius of observation. She understood that every being suffers from his own weakness and is tempted in proportion to that weakness. She dwelt on the satisfying truth that Barry, if he loved money, loved her far better, esteemed her good sense and, from the first, rated her judgment highly. He, who was impatient of other people's opinions, always gave due weight to hers, and not seldom, when they differed, he accepted her view of a question and abided by it.

In London he surprised her and won her admiration. He had never been there before, yet appeared to be as familiar with metropolitan ways as a native. He was interested and apprehensive; he received new impressions and enjoyed new experiences. Nor did he stint money; indeed, she was surprised to see how generous he proved. But he never missed the worth of his money, was cautious, even suspicious. He bought her some presents, but

nothing of which they did not know the approximate worth. Their investments consisted chiefly of things for Nun's Cross—furniture, crockery and the like. Barry also made a purchase or two for his uncle—agricultural implements, both for Nathan's own little farm at White Works and the larger property to be worked for him by his nephew. They took their pleasures cheaply and visited the places of free entertainment and instruction. One public institution above all others attracted Barry and he visited the Mint twice, deriving, apparently, the liveliest interest from observing the mechanical manufacture of coin. He often wished his Uncle David might have seen it. Marian found the theatre more fascinating, and she felt a professional interest in visiting some of the great public bars, whither they went for meals.

She observed that Barry often read newspapers and occupied himself with columns of financial news, which were Greek to her. They were seldom long apart; but once or twice he left her for a morning and explored London on his own account. A fortnight of pleasuring found them both very well pleased to go home again, and they returned to packing-cases full of their purchases that awaited them. Nor did they forget presents and commissions. For Aunt Sarah, who had generously remembered their union, they bought a gilt clock that cost four pounds. James proved the most difficult to delight, for he had no tastes that might be gratified. He had, however, directed Marian to buy a gift for Anstice, and this, doubtfully, she did.

So they returned and settled down to real life with energy and determination. And time travelled, while character was developed and revealed. Barry found Marian a helpmate, admirably steadfast, invariably cheerful. They discovered wide differences of standpoint, but they did not clash upon them, for the reason that the man, being quickest to perceive the differences, was at pains, at first, not to challenge them. Nor could he dare to quarrel with Marian's opinions, for transparent honesty and honour inspired them. She seemed incapable of a devious or peddling attitude under any circumstances, and when, as sometimes happened, he found her view unquestionably just, while his own was steeped in egotism,

or worse, he felt a healthy twinge that she should think straighter than he. For he was a complex man with a bent of frankness and a desire for plain-dealing, modified by ambition and an outlook far wider than his wife dreamed of at present—an outlook founded on bases of which she was ignorant. Barry puzzled her in many directions, as he soon puzzled the rest of his family; but his wife was not much surprised to be puzzled. She doubted not that every man of character must often puzzle his wife. Were they transparently clear, thought she, then, no doubt they would be common, simple men, and grow monotonous. But Barry was not common, or simple either. She held him a wonder and, being ignorant as yet of the charms of domestic monotony to the married woman, rejoiced to believe that the enterprising spirit of her husband would rise from surprise to surprise, from strength to strength.

Gradually things came to be accepted by her that at first awoke astonishment. Into some activities of his life Barry did not invite her. By no express direction was she refused entrance; but she quickly came to understand that his affairs were under his sole control. He would, indeed, talk about money and enjoyed to do so; but beyond general conversation, and assurances that the future promised well, he did not go.

Mr. Mortimer had transferred one of David's two roll-topped desks to his home, but Barry kept the other, that which had stood in his uncle's bedchamber, and this apartment he decreed was to be his private room, where he kept his accounts, wrote his letters and conducted his business. That he should have so much business to conduct was the first source of interest to Marian, and when on one occasion, a month after their return to Nun's Cross, he retired to this chamber after dinner on a Sunday and was long absent, she went up to see him and learn if she could help him. For Marian was a good hand at figures. But the door was locked, and when she asked him to open it Barry begged her to go away.

"Leave me alone, there's a dear," he said. "I'm beastly busy this afternoon."

She retreated without answering, and when, later, he emerged he made no mention of her visit, nor did she. But she never disturbed him again at his desk, though

she would often wander out to him at farm work and find herself welcome enough. The dead man's sleeping-room had an element of fascination for Marian from that day forward; but Barry created no mystery about it. He only locked himself in occasionally, and at other times she was free to go and come as she pleased. The great desk was, however, always shut. None saw that open but Barry himself. Marian considered whether she should ask her husband why he refused her knowledge of his affairs; why he never even asked her to help him with his accounts—work at which he knew she excelled. But she decided not to raise the question. Their lives lay before them. There was time enough, and he could not be expected yet to appreciate the value of her aid. Her own accounts she very scrupulously kept, and he had never grumbled at the figures she put before him weekly. Indeed, he applauded them.

"Keep going as you are," he said. "We'll launch out some day. I've got my ideas. We can live hard and work hard for many a year yet. The thing is to save money while you're young, then the money you've saved can work for you when you want to slack off. That's what Uncle David, with all his cleverness, wouldn't see. He'd earned the right to spend, and might have lived a good bit longer if he'd used the right."

She qualified this, however.

"That's true, but there's another side, and your poor uncle showed it. He saved for so many years that at last he forgot how to spend, and didn't want any of the things that money brings, but only the stuff itself, for its own silly sake."

"We shan't do that. If you catch me getting miserly, you come down on me like a ton of bricks," he said.

"No fear, I'm sure. Quite the contrary. You preach thrift, but you're too generous yourself—if a man can be too generous."

This in a sense was true, and represented another of Marian's puzzles as time went on. Her husband alternated between fits of large-mindedness and the opposite. He would spend sometimes in a way that almost alarmed Marian; then he would draw in his horns and demand retrenchment from everybody. He seemed to contradict

himself, and she noticed that he was happiest when working hardest and spending least, while less amiable when apparently most reckless. Herein developed her first problem; but problems hardly appeared before they disappeared again, and she always fell back after any clouded moment on the perfect love and worship that Barry at all times accorded her. She was, in fact, an exceedingly happy woman nine days out of ten, and at present no permanent shadow at any time dimmed her husband's own content.

Little by little, however, the man's fits of abstraction grew longer. He was annoyed with her once, because his mother spoke to him concerning some thing that Marian had mentioned.

"I do wish you'd keep my affairs to yourself, my girl," he said. "Here's mother knows all about that twenty-five pounds I've put into the Merivale granite quarry."

"Didn't you want her to? I never thought it was to be a secret. I hate secrets, Barry. They're more trouble than they're worth."

"That depends what they are worth," he said. "It isn't a question of secrets. But I don't wish my business investments, and so on, to be public property."

"I'm sorry. I won't say anything another time."

"You know mother. She'll be so proud I've put away a trifle that she'll run all round the country telling people."

"I quite see," promised Marian. "I'll say nothing again."

But she never had the opportunity to do so again. From that time forward Barry became less and less communicative. She was not curious, but his reserve distressed her, because it did not make for his happiness. He worked very hard, rose early, and late took rest; but he departed for a day sometimes. Occasionally he appeared dressed for town and went to Plymouth; and twice, at intervals of six weeks, he brought out his fishing-rod, bade Jenny cut him a packet of sandwiches, and declared his intention of a long holiday on the river. Rejoiced at the news Marian offered to join him, but he declined the suggestion.

"Water's terrible fine," he said, "and I shall have to work hard to get a basket. I shan't be company for you to-day—too busy all the time."

He came back in a very good temper, but with an empty creel.

When next he determined to fish, Marian did not offer to go with him, and he did not invite her to do so. He was moody and perturbed on this occasion, and Marian, at the elder woman's instance, spoke to Jenny when he had gone. They were alone in the kitchen.

"We'll keep the meat for supper," she said, "and have eggs and bacon for dinner. Master won't be back before night, I reckon."

"Be there anything on his mind? Seems to me he's not quite himself the last day or two," said Mrs. Bascombe. She and her mistress had struck into friendship from the first, and Jenny respected and admired the young wife's outlook and opinions.

"Do you think there is?" asked Marian, answering her.

But Jenny caught herself up and was guarded, knowing that the early months of marriage are critical and sometimes jog unevenly.

"Every man's got something on his mind for that matter, unless he's weak in his head," she answered. "There's lots to think about, and he's the thinking sort. They'll often hide themselves from us behind a cloud for a bit; but there's no occasion to trouble about it if they come out from the cloud again. When Jack's like that, I know from experience when to cut in and ax what's the matter, or leave it alone and take no notice. They always give signs when they want you to comfort 'em; and if they don't, then 'tis better to leave 'em alone. Mister Barry's all right. He's working hard. Do he sleep well?"

"Very well indeed."

"If a man sleeps well, it shows his mind's at ease," declared Jenny. "I'll lay he'll come back in a good frame of mind. The thoughts of the young are hopeful most times, and there's no call for him to be anything else. He's one of the lucky sort."

Mrs. Bascombe's prophecy proved incorrect, however.

Barry returned somewhat earlier than they expected him and brought a dozen and a half of small trout; but his mood had not changed. Indeed, a serious disturbance followed his return, and not only Marian, but Jack and his wife, had occasion to remember the moment.

The lonely hours with his own thoughts, whether hopeful or not, appeared to have awakened very unusual irritation in the fisherman, while accidents at home conspired to an outburst. He came back upon a momentary hiatus of industry. A farm labourer was dawdling with his hands in his pockets and his pipe in his mouth, talking to two men engaged on certain building operations; while indoors he found Jack by the fire with his stocking off, rubbing a rheumatic knee, Jenny away at Frog End, the tea things still on the table, and Marian looking at a newspaper.

He flung down his creel and swore.

"What the hell are you all doing?" he shouted. "Can't I turn my back a minute but the farm stands still? Here's Ned playing at being a gentleman at large in the yard, and you in here like a damned old woman, Jack, and you loafing, Marian. I won't have it, I tell you. It's a disgrace! Work! Nobody knows the meaning of work here. We're getting like a lot of stall-fed bullocks. There'll have to be changes darned quick if I'm anybody. Where's Jenny?"

Mr. Bascombe pulled on his stocking as fast as he could, and Marian turned to the tea things.

"Jenny's run over to Frog End to see Little Jack."

"Be damned to Little Jack. She's here to work, not play about. You didn't ought to have let her go. It's all along of selling milk instead of butter. Now you'll think there's nothing to do, too, I suppose."

Mr. Bascombe took himself off without a word. He felt immense surprise and a strange sense, as though he were living again in the stormy past. He relieved his feelings presently on the man Ned, to whom he attributed this outburst.

Meantime Barry continued to say hard and outrageous things; then his wife put down the tea-tray and stopped him.

She spoke on impulse, but without a shadow of anger.

She smiled while she answered, and was wholly ignorant of the extraordinary significance of the thing she said.

"My stars, Barry! Why, dear heart, I shall think you've been seeing the ghost of your Uncle David!"

He stared at her, and his colour changed. He opened his mouth to speak, but did not speak. An expression of acute concern smothered his face. The cloud of temper disappeared and there came a look that she had never seen before, a look she had not imagined could dwell on those frank and handsome features. It was a furtive, startled glance. Had such a thing been possible, Marian might have imagined that her husband had grown suddenly afraid of her.

She was as startled as he. She was going to speak again, but could not think what to say. Before she found her tongue he had gone. He went upstairs, and her first impulse was to follow him, but she thought better of it. She had evidently said something that struck with surprising force into Barry's imagination and turned his mind upon personal and apparently painful channels. Her mystification was complete, and she waited anxiously for their next meeting, but did not anticipate it.

None saw him for several hours; then he joined the supper party at which the life of the farm assembled, including the man Ned.

Marian had cooked the trout.

After a while Barry spoke. He appeared to have recovered, and made a generous apology.

"I came home a bit gallied, along of one thing and another," he said, "and I lost my temper and spoke what I didn't ought. I'm sorry, and hope you'll think no more about it. The fault was mine. Have another trout, Jenny? Did you find Farmer White in a better temper about Little Jack coming back to us after he's married?"

The incident was at an end; for, though his wife expected that he would say more upon the subject when they went to bed, Barry did not return to it.

She knew not whether to be glad or sorry that he left it there.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A CHILD IS BORN

The time arrived that should see Anstice Pascoe bear a child, and she approached it with only one concern. For her husband's sake she desired a son; herself she faced maternity in moods that alternated between dread and indifference. She was weak, and the doctor declared some concern for her. His apprehension did not reach Anstice, but caused her husband anxieties. Charles did all that was in his power, yet found himself challenged and shaken out of his usual serenity. He felt his nerves—an experience quite new to him. His first formula of life threatened to fail him, a fact that caused him the utmost astonishment and more concern than the apparent cause for such a disaster.

Anstice was very gentle and very easily managed, save in one particular. With unconscious cruelty she craved for the companionship of James. She revealed no desire to see him alone, but merely begged for his society as often as possible; and James, for his part, as simply and unwittingly, augmented the trials of Charles Pascoe. The master of Strane Steps was now sufficiently aware that he had ruined the life of Anstice, if not his own; nor could he hide the situation as it had affected James Worth. He felt shaken, therefore, from his old consciousness that all things happened for the best. His lifelong attitude availed nothing before this catastrophe, and to his bewilderment he found himself confronting a situation wherein it was possible at least to doubt whether right had happened. From a first inclination to regret the past, from an emotion almost akin to pity for James and Anstice in their ingenuous display, he turned to himself, and his increasing sorrow for Charles Pascoe soon hardened his heart towards those who had caused it. Their baby-like obstinacy became very irritating, and, taking refuge in the ordinary conventional attitude, Charles began to feel

the present relation both unseemly and ridiculous. He much regretted his amenities in the direction of James, who had blindly availed himself of the recent relaxations, and, with his soul centred on Anstice, found no wit to spare, no sympathy to waste, on the position of her husband.

Mr. Pascoe soon felt that neither his pride nor sense of propriety could endure the situation, and again James was cast out. The elder explained to him that the state of his wife's health now demanded this precaution. He toned down the dismissal, and began their interview with his temper well in hand; but presently he lost a measure of self-control, spoke plainly, and finally made it clear to James that he had only himself and his stupidity to thank for this second reverse.

Possessed by his one passion and conscious that his presence did Anstice good, cheered her spirit and improved her health, James had never thought of any other aspects of his intrusion. He had been made free of Strane Steps, and availed himself of the privilege, oblivious to every interest but that of Anstice. He perceived his lack of tact and judgment too late. He made fervent appeal, for the sake of Anstice; but Charles, who had not come to his decision without many vexations of spirit, proved determined.

The trio were not long troubled, however, for three days after this exile, and while James was still considering how he might change Pascoe's purpose, a day dawned that broke the monotonous simplicity of life at White Works.

At noon there came into the general store at Princetown Mrs. Dennis, upon her way to Strane Steps, and James, who served her, learned that she was driving at once to attend upon Anstice. Instantly he found himself in a ferment, and made no attempt to conceal his emotions. Work, he knew, must now be impossible, and, indifferent to the objections against any demand so unusual, he applied for permission to go home on urgent private business. His master did not see him, and it was to Miss Sophia Edwards he addressed his petition.

"I must go home," he said. "I hope you'll permit it, but I must go, anyway. There's a very anxious thing going to happen for a great friend of mine, and she's been very poorly of late; and I've had a cruel lot on my mind

about her one way and another, and I shan't be in no state to do my work any more to-day, Miss Sophia."

"What's the matter, James?" she asked. But she did not need to ask, for the peculiar situation at Strane Steps was familiar to her. Pascoe had long ago confided a measure of his difficulties, and found her advice valuable and her understanding of some comfort, for she was sympathetic on what concerned him.

James stood white and haggard. He stammered a little.

"In a word, Mrs. Dennis, my sister-in-law's mother, is on her way. Anstice—Mrs. Pascoe—she's just going to have her offspring; and she's not all she might be; and doctor's a bit put about over her. And it would be a great weight off my mind if you could let me get there to be near about till all's over."

Sophia was considerate, but she thought a great deal more of Charles than Jimmy.

"If you go, be sensible, James. I know a bit about the past—who don't? It was a sad business, and I was sorry for you both. But don't let your feelings run away with you. Go, but keep well out of the way, and don't worry anybody—least of all poor Mr. Pascoe."

"Yes, yes, very kind of you to say that, Miss Sophia. God's my judge that I never, never have—never have wanted to worry Mr. Pascoe, though, God forgive me, I've done so—in ignorance. Thank you—I'll make it up—I'll do a lot of overtime, or anything Mr. Edwards wants—anything. He'll know that."

"Be off, then; but keep out of the way, like a sensible chap. Remember what Mr. Pascoe must be feeling about it."

"I'll try—I'll do as you say. God bless you, I'm sure. Say a prayer for her," he answered, and then was gone.

And Sophia dropped her pencil, while her thoughts sped from the shop to the master of Strane Steps. She hoped with all her heart that Anstice Pascoe might die. She was a woman evasive with other people, but exceedingly frank with herself. Herein lay her strength. She never pretended inside the secret places of her own mind, and she believed now that, if Pascoe were free to do so, he would come to her. She understood him very completely

and continued to find him as satisfying, in his tribulations, as when no cloud dimmed his self-respect and steadfast belief in his own wisdom. For he had asked without words for her sympathy, and thus unconsciously intensified her regard. She had learned particulars of Anstice through another source, and knew that the mother might not come well out of her pending ordeal; and she felt it no great inhumanity to hope that the girl would vanish presently; for Charles had admitted that his wife was not a happy woman, and her desire to live of a frail consistence.

A bell rang, and a little box slipped down a string with cash and an account in it. Then Miss Edwards returned to work-a-day life, explained that James was called away, and directed a shop boy to attend to his duties.

Meantime Worth doffed his apron, put on his coat and hat, and started for home. The way had never seemed so long. He met Marian journeying to Princetown, and told her the news; but he did not stay, and her heart ached for him as, careworn and perspiring, he hurried on at a dog-trot.

"He might be the father, to look at him—poor James," thought Marian.

At home Jimmy learned from his mother that all was going well; but he could not stop in one place. He tramped round about with his eyes never off the roof of Strane Steps, and his perambulations drew him nearer and nearer to the door. It seemed to his nervous apprehension as though the farm were dead. He climbed to waste ground overlooking the hamlet and sat down presently, and let his fingers play in the herbage. A lark thrilled and showered his silver notes from overhead. At last the doctor appeared from the house, and a man came from the stable and drew out a trap and horse.

James intercepted the departing physician as he proceeded up the hill, and at the same moment Nathan Mortimer walked from his door and Sarah Mortimer hastened from hers. They converged upon the trap and saw the doctor, who, guessing their purpose, stopped and spoke.

"She has a little girl. The child's a small thing, but all right; the mother is not all I could wish. We must hope for the best. She's young, and if her strength keeps

up——I'll be back in a couple of hours. She shan't slip through our fingers if I can help it—be sure of that. Be hopeful."

He drove on, and nobody spoke. Then Nathan proceeded to Strane Steps, where his wife already was, and met her coming out. They returned home together, and James stopped for a moment with his Aunt Sarah. She talked to him, though he did not hear her, and bade him go home and pray.

"'Tis all we can do," she said; "Anstice be in God's Hands, my dear, but prayer's well known to strengthen His Hands."

It was now past four in the afternoon, and James returned to his mother, who made him take food. She had seen May Mortimer. Anstice was asleep. She had suffered a very bitter shock on hearing she had borne a girl.

May sat some time with Mary, sniffing her salts. She was exceedingly melancholy, and did not believe that her daughter could survive. Mary found stabs coming to her tongue-tip, but did not utter them. Then Nathan's wife remembered her husband, and said she must go back to him. The doctor would return within an hour or two.

James went out again, and met Marian, who had come down to learn the news. She walked backwards and forwards with him, and strove to console him. Then, as the light glowed from the west and evening approached, they saw Rebecca Pascoe leave Strane Steps and enter the home of James. Something told him there might be a message from Anstice, and he left Marian and ran back, while she followed.

Miss Pascoe was looking ten years older than usual, and appeared in the extremity of concern. James proved right. Anstice desired to see him, and Mrs. Dennis held that she had better do so.

"Charles is away for a minute," explained Rebecca. "He's that strung up and on wires about the misfortune of it all, that he felt he'd better just get away alone with his Maker for half an hour. He left her asleep; but she woke five minutes after he'd gone, and called for James. It ain't a time to deny her, in my opinion, for, if I know anything, she's going."

The man, in agony, left them and hastened bare-headed

to Strane Steps. His grief was extreme, and the prospect that Anstice might die weighed even on his feet and made them drag. Huge terrors got hold upon him, and not until he stood in the presence of Anstice had he grown calmer. But it was some time before he reached her; for Charles Pascoe, unable to find the preoccupation he required, came back again. He could not desert his home at this moment, though he had set out to do so for a little while. He was more completely upset than ever he had been in his life, and, among his other perturbations, found time to be bewildered with himself at this upheaval and dismay. He could scarcely credit the fact that his will had actually passed beyond his control. Not even existing disorder and disaster seemed really serious enough to reduce him to his present plight; for he had often told himself and others that nothing can hurt a man that strikes him from without; that none has power vitally to injure us but ourselves. Yet now, before these griefs for which he was not responsible, he found himself in the extremity of concern—turbulent, deranged, far fallen from his customary self-command, sobriety and sapience.

He could find a corner of his mind to analyse this condition as he abandoned his purpose and turned and hastened home again. And then very painful light broke upon the mystery. Too late it came; though it had already gleamed luridly enough upon the hidden places of his heart before to-day. He told himself the ugly truth: that he was not injured thus by forces outside himself; these tribulations were not such that he could feel honestly they arose from without him. His peace and content were stricken from within. He had erred in his marriage and let desire deceive. No longer might he take balm of virtue to heal this terrible misfortune, for the fault was his own. Nothing could palliate the truth and nothing modify the extent of his failure. A woman might presently die as the result of it; and he knew that she would not be sorry to die. There persisted also in his thought the fact that he was the father of a girl and not a boy. This, indeed, could not be set to his fault, but it contributed to his misery for two reasons: because Anstice held it a disaster, knowing his overmastering ambition, and because, feeling it so, it lessened her present very slender hold on life.

In this mood, and as near frenzy as it was possible for such a man to be, Charles came round the corner to his door and ran into James, who was just about to enter. Life's climax appeared to be reached for the elder. His emotions culminated, and he lost himself. 'Gentleman' Pascoe forfeited the worthy addition in one man's mind for ever.

He barred the entrance and bade James Worth be gone.

"Haven't you no sense of right and decency? Haven't you done enough? How dare you come here now, you senseless creature!" he cried in a voice that none had heard before. Actual rage suffused his face, and his teeth stared out of it like an angry animal's.

"Be calm," said James. "For God's sake don't take on. A loud voice may be the death of her. I wouldn't have come, but she sent for me. Wish I may die if she didn't. Ask your aunt—she's over to my mother's now. Anstice commanded me, and sent a message begging for me to see her."

"You shan't; you shan't, I say! I've suffered enough. I've done all in mortal power. Ask yourself—there's a limit, and we're past it. I say we're past the limit, James Worth!"

"I beg you, Charles. She's very ill and wants to see me. It's natural—it's natural, surely—nothing past no limits. Let me go in. 'Twill calm her. It may do her mind a lot of good. Mrs. Dennis said I ought to go."

"I order you not—I——"

He panted, and even clenched his fists. A strange thing happened, and for a moment James was the stronger of the two. What possessed him he knew not, and often wondered in days to come; but he dominated the situation, as though he, and not the other, had a right to command.

"Charles," he said, "you're wrong in this, and you'd never forgive yourself if you dared to withhold me. Life can't stand still. She's called to me. She may never call again. No harm can happen. Look forward and think what your future days will be if you come between her and the last thing she may ever wish for. Come with me if you please, but I must see her, and I will."

Pascoe hesitated, and then, without a word, he turned away, left the door and descended among his alder bushes to a garden seat there. Upon it he sat down and buried his face in his hands.

James did not see what he did, but entered at once, looked round him, and then ascended the stairs.

He heard voices through an open door, and a moment later stood by the bed in which Anstice lay. He found himself quite calm and collected.

"Here he is—speak soft, James," said the nurse. "And you mustn't bide very long, my dear. She's wishful to talk a little—very little."

He sat on a chair beside the sick girl and took her hand gently. His eyes, however, were on the face of Mrs. Dennis, and he perceived that she was troubled.

"Baby's sleeping nicely," she said. "I'll be back in five minutes." Then she went out of the room.

For sixty seconds of the precious time no sound broke the silence. Then James, speaking low, asked Anstice how she felt.

"It's all over, Jimmy," she said in a small voice. She could not speak loud, and he had to bend his ear to hear.

"It's all over, and I'm glad. Bad luck to the last, Jimmy, dear. A girl I've brought him, poor man. He spoke quite kind and said, 'Better luck next time.' You'll never forget the little thing, will you?"

"My God, no, Anstice. But you?"

"I'm going to die. They know it well enough. I want to die—I'm glad."

"Anstice, Anstice, don't talk like that to me."

"'Tis only to you I can. It's wrong to want to die, I suppose. But you understand. A baby's a baby, though. She's a good baby, they say. Charles will be kind to her, like he always is to everybody; but he won't love her like you must."

"Afore God, I'll be her friend so long as I live—faithful—faithful, Anstice. She'll be the only thing left to care about in the whole world if you go. But you mustn't go. You must fight to live."

"I've fought enough. 'Twasn't ever meant I should fight. I don't want to live. I'd be unhappy if I thought I was to go on living. I'm happy now you've promised to

think of my little one. I've seen it. She's very small, but Mrs. Dennis says she's a nice, perfect little maid."

"Live for it; make yourself say, 'I will live,' Anstice."

"There's nothing to life now I've brought him a girl."

"But me, me, Anstice!"

She smiled at him.

"There's nothing to you neither—nothing but fret and worry can I bring to you, Jimmy, darling. My life's only a thorn for you. You'll be a lot happier about me when I'm dead than you are now. I'm better out of it, and oh, I want to go; I want to fade away quick, while I'm comfortable like I am now."

"Don't try not to live—don't do that, Anstice."

"We'll meet again, Jimmy, dear, some day."

The wail of the child's voice came to them.

"I'll go very well content now I know you'll be her friend. She's going to be called 'Anstice,' James. They've promised. I thought of you when I made them."

He was dazed.

"There's only one Anstice," he said.

Mrs. Dennis came in.

"A dear little baby," she declared. "Now you must be off, James. Doctor's coming down the road."

"I'll see you again to-morrow, Anstice."

"Yes—kiss me. May he kiss me, Mrs. Dennis?"

"Why not, my dear?"

James stooped and kissed her.

"All in my power, all in my undying power I'll do for her so long as I live, Anstice," he said, and she comprehended and smiled again. At the door he looked back, to see she had turned her head and was still smiling at him. Then he went down to seek Mr. Pascoe.

He was waiting at the gate for the approaching trap.

"Thank you, Charles," was all the younger said before he went his way; but the husband took no note of him and did not answer.

Later came the news to all concerned that Mrs. Pascoe was holding her own. The doctor would return early in the morning.

Few slept at White Works during that night, and those beside the sick woman's bed did not expect that she would live until the day.

James spent the brief hours of darkness in the open air and watched the light glimmer along behind the northern hills and a waning moon rise in the arms of the dawn. He tramped many miles, but only within the immediate neighbourhood of Strane Steps. He knew the window of the sick room, and often crept into the garden that he might see a yellow gleam from within that marked the square of it. Sometimes a shadow crossed the light.

In the garden were glow-worms twinkling their golden-green fires among the grass-blades. He remembered how he and Anstice had sought them as children and told each other fairy stories about them.

Then came dawn over the hills and the rush of the pure white aube, with a transient flash of rose that danced through it. Trembling along the fleecy fingers of low clouds, it was gone. Soft rain began to fall as the light increased; detail vanished out of the sky and a morning wind sighed over the green hills.

Then came the doctor, plodding down again on horse-back. James saw him far off, and was at the gate of the farm to meet him. He asked whether Mrs. Pascoe was still alive, and the other, struck into palsy at the question, answered that he did not know. He took the horse and the doctor went in.

James walked the horse up and down. He found himself thinking of Anstice's baby all the while. As the time lengthened, his hope increased. It seemed a good sign to him and the delay cheered him, though, in reality, there was no delay. Then the physician returned in twenty minutes. He was frowning to himself.

"Thank you," he said to James, and mounted.

"How is it with her, please, sir?"

"Gone, I'm sorry to say."

Then he rode off, a baulked and weary man.

All heard afterwards that Anstice had slept very peacefully away in her husband's arms at the ebb of the night.

CHAPTER XXIX

HOLIDAYS

The summer months drifted by, and the longer the days the more swiftly they passed, as is the summer's wont. Then the high tops of the moorland trees, by a fading and a tinge of russet, again prophesied of autumn, though still the sun was hot and the ling swept with delicate radiance the grey heights and hills.

Upon such a cheerful day, when heat danced over the flats and the moor men were glad to mark their peat ripening well and growing ready for drawing, came Marian Worth to see her mother-in-law.

"'Tis one of the mornings when Barry's off on his own," she said. "Gone fishing somewhere and won't be back till night, so I thought I'd come and have my dinner along with you."

She was always welcome, for Mary had not recovered from the loss of her daughter, and declared herself a very lonely woman. She visited Damaris sometimes and spent a day or two at Princetown; but life had changed for her. Improvement of means had lessened her own labours and cares, yet, even as Sarah did, she looked back at the past with regret and held the new times were not so good.

"How's Barry, then? Haven't seen him for a month o' Sundays," she said.

"Busy as a bee with the peat for the moment. But a holiday with his own thoughts will do him good, I reckon. It comes over him sometimes that he must get away from everything on to the moor, and I understand that."

"So do I," answered Mary. He's got a very active fashion of mind. Too clever to be happy all the time, James says."

"I expect he is. But work's his god. I'm sure he's doing great things. We've got Little Jack and his wife

in the house now the two rooms are built on. A proper hive we are, and everything going very suent."

"Don't you do too much, however," said Mrs. Worth.

"I like work as well as anybody."

"And how's my son's temper? Perhaps 'tis only that time don't stand still with the young any more than with the old; but he's impatient here and there, and don't listen to my chatter quite so easily as he did."

"He's all right."

"Nothing on his mind, you wouldn't say?"

"Only just large ideas and looking forward. He's a great hand at looking forward."

"He is; but there's a danger in that. Often enough the present is the good time, and we never know it till it's gone. Then we look back and be mad to think we didn't make more of it while we had it. If I don't know that, who should?"

Marian laughed.

"Very thing I've told him. When I'm right I make the most of it, and I got him thinking on that, and he granted there was a good bit in it."

"There is, for certain. Trust the future when you're having a bad time; but don't cold-shoulder the present when things be going well. You wouldn't say Barry was under the weather, that he looks forward such a lot?"

"There's nothing that I know to make him. Yet 'tis idle to say he doesn't find his thoughts a bit acid sometimes."

"He's made Nun's Cross a proper little palace, I'm sure."

"He has. I sometimes think, when the lease runs out, he'll renew on his own."

"Yet he often talks of going to live down-along in some snug place on the flat presently."

"I don't believe he'll ever go from Nun's Cross, mother. He's all right, anyway."

"Ain't outrunning the constable, nor nothing like that? His uncle sometimes wonders if he's not taking too many risks. I heard him, only a week ago, say that Barry appeared to think Dartmoor farming never had no disappointments."

"He's not like that. He's a cautious man—more

cautious than ever I thought he was. He don't forget his Uncle David—often says the things he told him; and some are bitter hard, though often they're bitter true."

"I don't see why for there should be a cloud, then—everything going on so well."

"You can't fairly say there is a cloud. He's a very sensible man, and don't wear his heart on his sleeve."

"He did when he was a boy—none so open as him."

"He's a man now. I vexed him a few days agone, because, when I see him doing the things his Uncle David did, it frightens me. He was showing the old cross to some holiday-makers, and got half a crown by it. That pleased him a lot better than it did me. I don't like him to do such things, and I told him so. 'Tis small. He saw I was right, but it vexed him for a minute. Talk about yourself and James. Jimmy seems a bit more restful in his mind, I think. I suppose he's got no ideas beyond stopping in the shop?"

"Jimmy is getting reconciled outwardly," said Mrs. Worth. "He don't say much. He's a bit brighter the last few days, because he plucked courage to go in and ask Charles if he would have any objection to him putting flowers on her grave; and Charles said he might in reason."

"Poor Jimmy."

"He's not a very cheerful son. I feel ten year younger than him, old as I'm growing. He's home for the minute, having his annual holiday. He's helping Uncle Nathan get in his early potatoes this morning. A bit of exercise like that will do him good."

"So it will, then. He was asking me if I had any little remembrance of Anstice I didn't want, and I've fetched him a pen-wiper she made out of a bit of flannel for Barry and gave him one Christmas, long ago. I daresay he'll like that."

"I expect he will. You can only trust time; and I don't even trust time where him and her memory's concerned, because time stands still in a very curious way with him. You might say time stopped for him when she died."

"It can't do that. If nothing happens outside us,

something's always going on inside, because we've got to get older, and things must go on happening to us. You'd never believe it, mother, but already the old days at 'The Plume of Feathers' seem to grow faint in my mind, and I catch myself wondering what it was like there!"

"I remember what it was like well enough when I had my three under my roof," answered Mary.

They talked awhile longer, then came dinner; and as they could see in the valley that James was still labouring at the potatoes, Marian said she would go and call him.

She descended, therefore, to the little fields among the old mine workings and met Nathan Mortimer and his nephew returning.

"You've come from Barry, I reckon," said Nathan; but she told him it was not so.

"Barry's off fishing to-day down to the Nosworthy brook under Combeshead, I believe."

"Well, why not? Have he got my peat in?"

"Very near all. Beautiful peat this year."

"It is. David used to say when the cotton grass was plenty the peat was of the best, and so it happens. Will 'e come in and have your dinner along with us, Marian?"

"I'm going to have it with mother. But I'll look in after."

"Come to tea, then. Your Aunt May will be very pleased to see you."

"I'll come in; but I won't stop to tea. I'm having a holiday, too, and I'm going on to Princetown presently to see my people."

"So be it. I'm wishful to visit Barry o' Sunday, and will ride over on my pony I shouldn't wonder."

"I'll tell him."

Nathan turned into his house, and James proceeded home with his sister-in-law.

"I didn't forget what you wanted," she said, and gave him a small packet. "She made it for Barry long ago, and he wants you to have it."

His hands trembled as he opened the paper.

"Thank you, thank you ever so, Marian. That'll be a little gold mine. Tell Barry it's safe with me. My thought is to save such things up—hoard 'em for her baby,

you know. Come some day they'll be priceless to the child, I should think."

"I'm sure they will be."

"And it's something to do. I began in quite a small way, with one of they little handkerchiefs she used, with a pink border to it. Now I feel like Uncle David did over his money. I gather up the things as I can get 'em—only the things she used and cared about. If her hand can be proved to have touched a thing, then it's good. Don't you tell nobody. It comforts me in a way."

"I'll see if we've got anything else specially belonging to her like."

"Don't you mention it, however."

"I won't. I'm ever so glad that Charles Pascoe will let you put flowers there, Jimmy."

"Yes; he was very nice about it. We understand each other better than we did. I've told the man that I can feel for him a lot more abiding than anybody else in the world, and he begins to know it now. Looking back, Marian, and hearing the people talk, I can see a lot about Charles; but I don't tell him the truth, because that's only dead truth now and would vex him a great deal. But I know it, and everybody will know it some day. If you feel so much for a person as I do, it makes you cunning. I'm cunning and crafty, and very near as clever as Barry himself on that subject, and I know what I know about Charles."

"Don't you talk about it if it worries you."

"I don't. I'm too sad a man to be worried. Sorrow puts you above worries, Marian."

After dinner Marian called upon her aunts, and sat half an hour with Sarah and half an hour with May. Both were melancholy. Sarah still mourned Jane Bond, translated to the wife of Little Jack; while the mother of Anstice spoke only of her child. There was an inclination always to excuse herself when she discussed the dead.

"You can only do your duty; you can't make it come out right," said Mrs. Mortimer. "And, looking back, I can always rest in the sure knowledge that I did everything a mother might do for my poor child."

"Who doubts it?"

"Nobody, I should hope. But I tell myself it was so, and Nathan, too."

"We can't be wise till afterwards in most things," answered Marian. "Uncle Nathan, talking to Barry a bit ago, said the test was, when looking back at anything, to ask yourself if you'd do the same again if you could go back; and he said that, in his experience, men are so faulty in their judgment that as often as not, if they could choose again, they'd choose different."

"Men may be so faulty, and he knows himself, no doubt," said May. "For my part, I'm not so mean-spirited. I did what I thought was best for Anstice; and I believe it was best; and, if the time had to come over again, I'd do likewise."

"Then your mind's at rest, and you've got no call to trouble yourself. How's the little one going on?"

"They're leaving no stone unturned to rear her," answered May. "Charles is a good father, to the extent of a wet nurse from Plymouth at doctor's advice. I hope she's going to be spared. She's like her mother at her age."

"She'll be a great joy for Mr. Pascoe when she gets sense."

"No," answered May. "No, she won't be that, things being as they are. He wants, before all else in the world, to hand on his name to the next generation. He's last of his line at present. He'll marry again when the mourning year's out. We don't blame him."

"I expect he's felt it a great deal, however."

"I can't say as to that. I shall certainly make it my business to be a good grandmother to the child."

"I'm sure you will. James was telling me about her."

"I don't want to hear anything about James," said Mrs. Mortimer.

Marian presently went her way. She had found herself sharing Barry's dislike of Aunt May, but strove to be independent. They seldom met, and had little in common when they did. From time to time Marian's husband detected inspirations from Mrs. Mortimer in the things Nathan proposed and directed at Nun's Cross. And sometimes Barry perceived that he must comply; while on other occasions he argued successfully against his uncle's suggestions.

It was understood that Nathan would not renew the lease of Nun's Cross when it expired; but whether Barry might ask the Duchy for an extension remained to be seen. It appeared certain that he must be in an independent position before that time; but he shared David's hatred of Duchy, though, as against that, he also shared his affection for Nun's Cross. What Barry might do had become the chief subject of conversation with the Bascombe family, and, while Little Jack believed he would elect to leave Dartmoor, Jack the elder doubted it.

To-day, with the master and mistress both from home, Jack and Jenny had opportunity for some private speech, and took it.

Jenny, who had looked forward with the very keenest joy to the new arrangements, and imagined that nothing could conduce more to her happiness on earth than the return of her only son to Nun's Cross, found that even this perfect plan, when realised, failed of the flavour of anticipation.

She and her husband were left alone after the midday meal, and Jack struck into the subject directly, for he uttered an expression of regret when the younger Mrs. Bascombe and her husband had left the kitchen.

"Sorry you spoke so sharp to Jane," he said. "She didn't like it, and, if you can believe what she answered, she didn't earn it."

"I'm sorry, too," confessed Jenny, "and I'll tell her so presently, but not afore Little Jack. Would never do if his mother was to demean herself afore him to his wife. Jane's a very good girl, but a thought too sure of herself, like all the rest of the rising generation."

"And yet, when you heard the arrangements, you was mighty glad."

"I was. Arrangements often be a terrible sight more pleasing than the things when they happen. I won't deny to you, Jack, that there's too many women in this house nowadays."

"Lord!" he said, "d'you feel like that?"

"I stand up for my sex, as you know; but there's a limit, and, if I'd seen what it meant to have three women here, I shouldn't have been so excited about it."

"When you reigned all alone was the time," admitted

Mr. Bascombe. "And yet I'd be very sorry to go back to the old paths, I'm sure."

"So would I for most things."

"It might be a long sight worse, too," said her husband, "because missis and Jane happen to be very nice young women. If they'd been a couple of terrors——"

"They are," granted Jenny; "they are nice young women, and God knows I'd never grudge a man a nice woman—least of all my own son. We've all got our troubles, no doubt."

"Yes," he said, "and you've got to bear in mind that this brace of females be new plunged into wedlock, and, with the best of goodwill and nice feeling on both sides, it takes time to settle down to the collar."

"With our son, however, all's bound to work vitty, him being what he is."

"There'll be no trouble there, nor anywhere else, I hope; but Mister Barry's a character, and I daresay, if he puzzles us, as he certainly do off and on, that he puzzles his missis also."

"They're what you might call almost silly fond of each other, however, though there is a lot of mystery to the man."

Jack Bascombe considered.

"If things were going bad, then one might trouble about the mysteries; but as they appear to be going mighty well, we needn't disturb ourselves. He's doing a lot of clever deeds on his own, and they appear to come off all right, and there's plenty of money seemingly. And I'm going to ask for a few days' holiday myself before Michaelmas. I've a great fancy to go off the moor with you for a week."

Jenny was doubtful.

"Better us don't take no risks, perhaps," she said.

"What risks? He'd be very pleased for us to have a bit off. He's advised me to do it himself when he's in a good humour."

"'Tisn't that," she answered; "but sometimes it comes over me now that we're catched up in such a proper whirl of strong, tireless people, that they'll find out presently we're getting old. The young like to have the young about 'em, and if Mister Barry begins to compare

what you can do with what Little Jack can do, and what I can do with what Jane can do—in fact, if we was away for a week and everything ran easy and nice without us, it might come over master and missis that Nun's Cross could get on very well if we bided away altogether. And we don't want to help 'em to find that out."

"Have no fear there," answered Jack. "Tis only your modesty speaks. The mistress is no fool, even if the master be. But he's not, neither. They very well know what's stored in our heads, and fifty boys and girls like Little Jack and Jane couldn't take the place of our intellects. Far from things going more easy with us on holiday, they'll be more like to take a turn to show our worth. If you're wishful for people to miss you, the clever thing is to be out of the way just when you know they'll want you most."

"A very dangerous experiment to make, Jack."

"They can't do without us yet. The young generation be at our mercy in some directions still, and always will be."

Jenny nodded.

"That's true," she said. "There's children in sight, and though the boys and girls sniff at their mothers when they go out in the world, 'tis wonderful how they run to them again when they come to that business. We're good for something then, anyway—the toads."

That evening Jack asked for a week's holiday, and Barry expressed the heartiest satisfaction. He had returned on this occasion from his lonely day in the best of tempers.

"After we've sent the Michaelmas geese to market you shall go," he said, "and what's more, Jack, I'll find a 'fiver' to give you a bit of fun. You take Jenny to London, my boy! It's a disgrace that such a man as you and such a woman as her should never have seen London."

"We shouldn't never know how to behave, I'm sure," said Jenny; "but I suppose they be well used to foreigners up there."

Little Jack was much impressed with the suggestion.

"You go, father," he said, "and take mother. Such a thing would be a great adventure to remember when you both get up in years. And I'm sure people would respect you for it."

CHAPTER XXX

EGOTISTS

The autumn equinox was come, and at the end of September a tremendous wind shouted day after day sleeplessly over the moor at fifty miles an hour. Even the stunted thorn and close-set brake of spring furze bent and shook to it. It roared steadfastly from its secret places in the Atlantic, and before it daily drove a thick scurf of tattered fog banks, now almost black where they clung to the tors, until the wind dragged them away again; now spreading like purple wine in the dark cup of Fox Tor Mire; now pallid and torn into flakes and filaments full of light, when the clouds thinned and the sun sped a shaft through, before he was again swallowed by the vapours from earth and sea. At such moments the flying, burning whisps of the fog were reflected in every lake and pool, or on the cherry red faces of the streams. The hills had yielded their colour and rolled dim green and ash grey under the curtains of the mist; but day after day the horizons were hidden by the prevailing vapour: a traveller making head against the wind, or driven before it, saw not much more than a mile round about him.

Through such a day Little Jack and his wife tramped from Nun's Cross, each laden with two heavy baskets, to Princetown, that they might meet a huckster there, who would convey the produce to Plymouth market. Sometimes Barry contemplated his own stall at Plymouth; but Nathan Mortimer doubted, and the subject being of too peddling a character for the younger man's enlarging viewpoint, he did not insist.

Now Little Jack talked to Jane. They were clad for foul weather, and he walked to windward of her that he might shelter her from the worst of the gale.

"By Gor! never knowed such a spell of coarse wind as this," he said. "'Tis most more than my legs can do to travel against it."

Indeed, he was sometimes blown out of his stride by a sudden gust, which Jane observed.

"You be so long and thin in the legs and so broad in the body that it gets a purchase on you," she said.

"The baskets keep me down, however," he argued.

They were happy, though thus unpleasantly served by the great forces of nature.

"'Tis amazing that Mister White haven't forgive me yet for leaving him," said the man. "I passed him two days agone and touched my hat as of old; but he only gived a gurgle down in his throat like an angry dog."

"Don't you touch your hat to him no more, then. It was all right and proper. Miss Mortimer was the same with me in a way. She felt my going a lot because she hated change, yet she knew it had to be."

"People getting up in years hate nothing so bad as change," said Little Jack.

"Because their feeling is to stand still and let well alone, and have no more adventures, they get vexed with us younger ones, who must be moving. The world would soon be a dead-alive hole if we was under the dominion of the old."

"Freedom's a great idea," he admitted. "For my part, I should like to have enough money and time to make a proper beast of myself just once—to see what it feels like."

"You didn't ought to say that," declared Jane—"least of all to me. And you never shall do such a thing if I can prevent it."

He laughed.

"I ban't hopeful it will happen," he confessed.

"What would you do, I should like to know?"

"I can't tell you, because you'd remember it against me. But you mustn't think I'd do anything disrespectful to you, Jane."

"If you wanted a bit of fun as you couldn't share with me, it would be disrespectful," she answered. "I'm sure, if ever I was in the way for a bit of fun, my first thought would be you."

"I'm sure it would, with your nice mind, Jane. But woman's fun ban't the same as man's fun. Take Mister

Barry—a very good husband, I'm sure, and dotes on missis; but, all the same, he has days off to Plymouth and one place and another."

"He goes on business. He's full of business nowadays. Your father says that he's less and less in his working clothes. That's a mark how he's getting on."

"Less and less need to be in working clothes, I reckon. But he ain't what you might call so easy-minded as he was," declared the husband. "I notice more now I'm married to you. Married men do notice a lot more than bachelors. And I see that he's not so light-hearted as he was of old times."

"He's got a deal to think of and look forward to and plan for."

"Be working his brains too hard, I shouldn't wonder."

The object of their conversation passed them on horseback. He was riding into Tavistock, and directed Jane to make some purchases for Marian before returning home. He gave Jack something to do at Princetown also. Then he rode on.

"He gets so short in his speech, don't he?" said Little Jack.

"'Tis the ugly weather."

But the man did not agree with her, and he was right. Barry had of late changed from the old urbanity to his fellow-creatures. Apparent prosperity by no means tinctured his manners, and though his temporal affairs moved through weather fair enough, the weather of his mind appeared unsettled, with inevitable and visible results.

This altered outlook none knew better than his wife; but to-day chance willed that another became impressed with it, for Charles Pascoe was also called to Tavistock, and on the long ride home the men met near Moor Shop, at the frontiers of the moor, and rode side by side for some miles together. The weather had mended after noon and sunshine flooded the evening waste with pale gold as they walked their horses up a great hill under the Staple Tors.

They spoke of markets and the harvest. Barry cursed freely, for the wet autumn had done much injury to crops, and, where they rode, forlorn fields of oats extended about

them—ripe grain that had been cut, but would never be gathered, and lay running to ruin on the earth. Charles, too, mourned these misfortunes in more temperate language.

"It's hell to see man's hard work all flung to the mice and birds," said Barry, and the elder admitted it and drew a moral.

"These things remind us that we are not everybody," he said. "In some cases, too, it's a punishment. We are very prone on the moor to put off our duties and not take time by the forelock, as the saying is. I got in my oats."

"You're in the lew under the hill, and your oats was ripe a fortnight sooner than these. 'Tis ignorance more than anything. Dartmoor farmers are an ignorant lot and won't learn."

"Providence is always ready to teach, however."

"I don't know about that. God punishes the weak and ignorant most. The clever ones can dodge Him, I reckon."

But there was trouble in his eyes as he uttered the remark.

"Not at all," expostulated Charles. "You oughtn't to say that. God hates ignorance more than anything, and rightly so. Man has been in the world for countless years, and he ought not to be as ignorant as he is. And the clever people—the really clever people—don't try to dodge their Maker, because they know very well they can't. To be crafty is not to be clever, I assure you. To be clever is to avail yourself of what God teaches you—that's the highest cleverness."

"Well, He's certainly taught you to get what you want," said Barry.

"Nobody has erred oftener than I have," confessed Pascoe, "but to grant one's mistakes is good discipline—and good business, too; because, if you keep them clearly before you, you won't make them again."

The other admitted this to his own mind, but not to Charles.

"The devil of life seems to me that you can't see down to the roots of it," he answered. "That's where my late uncle had the pull. He saw deep and knew what he

wanted and never let anything on earth come between him and his will."

"No, nor anything in heaven either," replied Charles. "It's when your will and your sense of right clash, Barry, that you come to grief. I know—I know. I'm not preaching, I'm only telling you from sad experience. But if the desire finds itself up against the sense of right, then you may be sure there's something wrong with the desire."

Barry considered this.

"What you call conscience," continued Pascoe, "that's another word for the sense of right fixed in all of us."

"Conscience ain't always right, I reckon."

"Indeed, it is—always."

"Why? It's only a home-taught thing—what's been put into you by your mother, or a parson, or some fool."

"Far from it. I won't allow that for a moment. If you palter with conscience like that, you miss its teaching. And what's left, then? The still, small voice isn't put into you by your mother, Barry, nor yet by no parson."

"Life seems to be getting out of the frying-pan into the fire, and then back from the fire into the frying-pan," said the master of Nun's Cross gloomily.

His hearer felt surprise.

"I'm very much astonished you should say so," he declared. "Life would be that, and no more, if we were as the grasshoppers of the field and never thought where we were going to land when we hopped off; but you—you of all young men! Surely, you look ahead farther than that? We've got a sort of an everyday example of looking ahead in the Duchy."

"Blast the Duchy!"

"Exactly! That proves how wrong you are. You can't blast the Duchy; you can't hurt the Duchy in any way, and I'm sorry you wish to. But it's the power of looking forward and seeing where you want to get, I mean. Duchy never dies. Men come and go, but Duchy knows that time was only made for man, not for men; it looks ahead, and keeps its eye on the far future, and don't think in figures of a human life. That's an

example, and we ought to do the same, and not think in figures of our span on earth, but our hold on eternity."

"Duchy's not out for living men—I grant that. It don't care a curse for its tenants—any of us; and if we weren't a lot of weak-kneed fools we'd band together and slay it and get our land for ourselves. I'd give a lot to bring Duchy down, and I hope I'll live to see it down—hard devil."

"Justice is justice and law is law; and the Saviour told us to render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's."

"I'd only give where I wasn't strong enough to keep. There's a time coming when our sort will be strong enough to keep; then let your Cæsars go to hell, where they belong."

"You say more than you feel, I'm sure. You mustn't tread on Christian corns, Barry. That won't help you."

"They've got such a lot of corns. Truth's bound to tread on 'em."

"You're a Christian yourself, I should hope?"

"I don't know what I am. I only know that——" He broke off. "'Tis very hard to be patient with the fools, Charles. Look at the things they do. There's my Aunt Sarah; she's squandered twelve pounds of her money on a harmonium! Silly old lunatic; and, of course, don't know no more how to play it than her cat. Twelve pounds! Must have an heirloom to leave behind her, she says! The only heirloom any sane person wants is cash, I should think."

"I heard about that—very curious. Of course, she has no use for money—it worries her—and she got a craze to buy a bit of property, something solid. She thought a great deal about it, and suddenly—so she told Miss Pascoe—had the notion of an American organ. What led her to it, of course, we can't say. But the idea was property."

"And good money's paying dividends for an old idiot like that."

"Many idiots depend on dividends. Life is full of these puzzles. One can only hope she'll get some pleasure out of the instrument. But I'm afraid she won't. It will be an additional worry, dusting it and taking care of it, and so on."

They talked a little longer, then broke into a gallop, and presently walked again at the hill out of Merivale.

Barry ventured on a personal remark before they parted, and annoyed the other somewhat. At Princetown he spoke.

"Well, I'll go on now. You'll be calling at the stores, I reckon, for a talk with Miss Sophia—eh?"

The speech was impertinent, but the statement correct. Charles often visited the emporium now, and made no secret of the fact.

Mr. Pascoe raised his eyebrows.

"And why not," he asked, "if I wish to do so?"

"No reason at all—good luck!"

At the moment they were abreast of the big shop, and James Worth appeared. It had grown dusk, and the shutters were about to go up.

Barry proceeded, and for a time walked his horse beside James.

"Making the running pretty strong, seemingly—Pascoe, I mean," he said.

"Have other people noticed it, then? I suppose they have by now. I was the first to. I knew pretty well so soon as Charles himself, I believe. It began—God's my judge—it began exactly three months after Anstice was buried. He couldn't deny it—more couldn't Miss Edwards."

But Barry felt not particularly interested.

"He was sure to look round for another. 'Twas a toss up between Sophia Edwards and poor Anstice at first."

"A toss up! How fearful to say that. Do the lives of people hang on a toss up?"

"Don't you know they do? Or less. Life's all a matter of character. It don't depend on goodness, or badness; it depends on will power. You ought to have found that out sooner than me. Look at your own mess-up. Goodness couldn't save you, because you're weak. That's what I've been telling Charles Pascoe. To be good don't get you what you want."

"It's the only way to be content, however, Barry."

"Who the deuce wants to be content? A cow or a sheep is content. If I'd loved Anstice instead of you, what would have happened?"

" You'd have got her."

" Yes, I would, and ten million Pascoes wouldn't have come between."

" It shows that Charles never felt a quarter what I felt for her, Barry. In fact, it properly gives him away, and I've lost my remaining respect for him altogether to see he can think of another woman."

" What does it matter now ? You waste all the little powers you've got in mooning, and mourning over things that can't be altered. When you could have altered them you didn't."

" It's cruel to say that, Barry."

" You're the sort that can't be helped because you haven't no sense of what's real, James. You never seem real yourself, for that matter."

" I'm real enough to myself, but my life's ended so far as the world at large is concerned. As for what's real, there's only one real thing left for me in the future. I dare say that may seem strange to you."

" So strange, that in time, if you go on like this, you may get weak in your head and be locked up."

" D'you really think so, Barry ? "

" Why not ? "

" There's the power of goodness and there's the power of will," said James, " and what I'd like to know is whether goodness or will power makes a man happiest. I ain't good, because, in my judgment, if I was properly good, I should be a lot happier than ever I find myself. There's only being along with one person in the world makes me happy now. But you have got will power—more than the lot of us put together—and what I'd very much like to know is whether your will power makes you happy ? Because, if it does, you don't show it."

" How don't I show it ? "

" In a lot of ways. You're successful, we all know, but success don't make you happy ; and we've only got to look back to what you was with Farmer White before you went to Nun's Cross, and compare you then with what you are now, to see that. Then you hadn't twopence and no prospects, and was always whistling about it, and no more on your mind than a grey bird."

" I was a boy then, and didn't know I was born. I'm

married now, and going to be a father, with cares and responsibilities."

"All in the fair way of nature, and all promising very proper. And yet you can't say honestly you're a happy man."

"There's better things than happiness, and more interesting things."

"More interesting, perhaps, but none better. Else the world wouldn't shout for it. It's the best anybody can hope for. And I'd greatly wish to know why you're not happy."

"How the hell can anybody say I'm not happy if I've got everything to make me so?"

"If you'd got everything to make you so, you would be. I don't ask for rudeness, only so as I should be wiser about human nature myself."

"I haven't got time to be happy, then. Too busy."

"That won't do. To be busy is to be happy, if you're busy about right and proper things."

Barry was silent.

"And it comes to this," added James, "it shows that will power ain't everything. You're a very ambitious man, and ambition ain't a fault, I believe; but perhaps a very ambitious man can't be happy."

"Perhaps he can't. So you're answered."

"You don't feel yourself growing too fond of money, do you? Don't you let money master you, Barry."

"No, no. Money's only a machine. Money's like steam—only the power to produce what's more valuable than itself, yet can't be got without it."

"I'm sure you're greatly blessed in your wife. She's a a very wonderful woman in my opinion, and a tower of strength, I should think."

The younger gave heart-whole agreement to this sentiment.

"She is all that," he said. "Marian's a blessed wonder. If you can understand, James, Marian's almost too much a wonder. I'll own this, that she's real as daylight, and makes things take their true colours. I don't know how she does it, or where she gets the art from, because she never was much educated, of course; but she sees a side of things I don't see. I'm frightened of her sometimes.

She's a damned sight too good for me—or any man ever I saw in my life."

"Fancy! That's just how I used to feel to Anstice. I'm properly glad to hear you say that."

"But a man's life is a man's life, and there's lots of difficulties and such like that a strong man can't, and won't, share with his wife—even such a wife as her. She looks at life from a jolly fine point of view; but you can't call it practical politics sometimes; and if you know before you ask her that she'll take a line opposite to sense, then it's no good asking her."

"Depends what you call sense," said James. "I know what Edwards calls 'practical politics.'"

"What?"

"Why, the tricks of the trade. A trade didn't ought to have no tricks, in my opinion; but they all do. And right's right, and wrong's wrong, just as much if you be tricky with farthings as with pounds."

Barry considered this.

"A man must go his own gait, and get on with his own life to the best of his power and wits," he said. "The thing is to keep your eyes on the future. But I despise peddling. If I'm ever hung, it will be for pounds, not pence."

"You've got to get on with your own life, certainly. But it's better to have other people in it than not—like you. And healthier. I thank God there's one left to me—only one, now."

"So you said a bit ago. One you can like to be with. I wish it was a girl. Then there might be some hope for you."

"It is a girl," answered James. "I mean Anstice's baby. They let me see her, as you know. The days I see her are the only red-letter days for me."

"You'll go mad all right if you don't watch it, Jimmy."

"I ain't afraid of that. If it was ordained I was to go mad it would have happened long ago."

They parted presently—types of men turned to egotists, after the common way, by sorrow and success.

CHAPTER XXXI

DOUBT

"No man of sense ever attempts to please everybody," said Charles Pascoe. "I've just put up a stone cross to my dear, late wife, and because it is made of red granite, from Scotland, instead of white marble, certain people are put about."

He was talking to Sophia Edwards and her father, who had come to take a Sunday dinner at Strane Steps. The year had turned, and the time was late March.

"I shouldn't think it became anybody to judge you in a personal thing like that," said Sophia.

"So long as people of sense are satisfied, one must be content."

"James Worth, you mean, I expect?"

"I do. There is much about poor James you could wish altered, and some things worthy of respect."

"I wouldn't lose him for money, myself," declared the master of the stores. "A harder worker and honester man, in his place, I never met."

"Faithful unto death, you may say," declared Sophia.

Charles regarded her approvingly.

"A very Christian way of describing James. If he had more brains he might have become somebody; but the want of intellects will always stand against him. Barry Worth's got all the brains in that family, in my opinion."

"He has," said Sophia, "and always had. I remember things in the past. A clever chap."

She had her thoughts on the days when she had helped Barry in the matter of James and Anstice; but, since these incidents could certainly not be detailed in this company, Sophia proceeded without giving time for questions.

"I think, if James had Barry's great energy of mind, and Barry had his straightforward view of life——"

"No, no," declared Mr. Edwards. "I wouldn't alter James by a hair. He's a most excellent sort of valuable

man, and quite as useful as the showy ones. You can't do the work of the world without the sound, trustworthy. second-rate creatures. You can't have too many of them."

"He's more like one of they kindly, unmarried women you see," said Rebecca Pascoe. "I always feel with James he's more one of us in a way."

Miss Edwards laughed.

"He is nice and finnicking," she granted. "There's nobody like him for a parcel; and a good shop manner, too. People like to be waited on by him. Patient to a marvel, and never crossed by the rudest."

"Our relationship has been, as you know, rather out of the common," explained Charles. "He was honestly attached to my dear, late wife, and I need hardly say I respected that feeling in the man as far as possible. He comes and goes even now, and he likes to see my little girl."

"More than that, Charles. The child's the joy of his life."

"We mustn't think the worse of him, Aunt Rebecca."

"I'm sure I don't," said Miss Pascoe. "It's a great thing for any young child to have such a good friend from her youth up."

"Would you like to see my infant, Sophia?" asked Mr. Pascoe, and she answered that it would give her great pleasure to do so.

The baby was brought in, and Miss Edwards regarded it with kindly interest.

She took it in her arms, and dangled for it a thin gold chain which she wore round her neck.

All knew very well the way matters were tending, and Rebecca expressed gratification at the baby's good temper. For the infant Anstice twinkled her pale brown eyes, stretched up a little hand, and smiled.

"She takes to you, Sophia."

"You will easily see that she favours her mother," added Charles apologetically. "There's nothing of the Pascoe in her so far, I'm afraid, though it may develop with years."

"She's certainly as like your poor wife as a young babe could be," admitted Miss Edwards. "Is she strong and hearty? Her skin's like a dog-rose."

" There's nothing the matter with her, though not what you'd call ' hearty.' But a sweet temper, seemingly."

" Ah, she would have. Got that from both parents," declared Sophia.

Mr. Pascoe invited Miss Edwards to come for a stroll before tea, and she put on her hat and jacket and accompanied him, while her father and the aunt of Charles discussed them. Each praised their own, and Mr. Edwards expressed frank regret that he must lose his daughter.

" You only know one side of her yet, " he said ; " but there's another. There's the woman you've seen, and as womanly a woman as you could wish."

" She is," admitted Rebecca.

" But there's the manager also—the master of figures, the organiser, the business head. She's got a grasp. I often wonder what will become of my books when it happens."

" There was a rumour you was going to turn yourself into a company."

" There was," he said, " and, if I knew who started it, I should very likely do something sharp. I may, or I may not, turn into a company in years to come. But nobody has the right to speak on that subject. I haven't reached the age to start giving away anything yet, and there's no need."

" As to age, I should hope not," said Miss Pascoe. " Your family's always young for your years. Sophia don't look much above five-and-twenty on her good days."

" He hasn't spoke, however."

But the subject was actually on the lips of Charles at the time, for, while he walked with his future wife, Mr. Pascoe ventured to touch it.

" Thank God," he said, " there's such an understanding between us now that it rises high above words, Sophia."

She had been waiting his time, and fixed a probable date in her own mind. She was, therefore, fluttered to find the proposal apparently at the door some three months before she expected it.

But he did not design to propose.

" Whatever do you mean ? " she asked, and he replied :

" I mean that I have for you such admiration and affection combined, that to be in your company is the

best thing that can happen to me. But I'm sure I shouldn't feel that, if I didn't also believe you found yourself pretty content along with me."

She did not answer, and he proceeded.

"Such a very fine state of affairs between two people only means one thing, in my opinion; but I beg you'll stop me if you don't get the same sensations from it. And being so, in the ordinary course of nature, I should speak, Sophia, and tell you what you are to me. But the case is complicated owing to the dead. Being a widower and living, as I do, in the midst of my late wife's relations—you see? One has to remember that great respect is generally due to the dead—certainly in this case. So you'll be pretty sure to agree with me that a year must pass. You don't think it wanting in me to say these things, I hope?"

"You never say anything that anybody can call wanting, Charles."

"Thank you, Sophia. I try not. I have a very great and deep attachment for you, but you'll understand my motives in not mentioning it at present?"

"Quite," she said. "Just what I should expect."

He breathed a sigh of satisfaction.

"That's a great weight off my mind; because it puts our friendship on the highest basis, if you follow me. It also makes me safe. It's asking for a first refusal, Sophia. It means, if I may say so, that you won't say 'yes' to any other man until you've heard me. I may tell you I should never have ventured to say these things to any ordinary woman. But you've long been my second self, I assure you—so there it is—on, or about the tenth of June, if God so wills, and you can hear, I shall humbly ask you to be my wife."

"Thank you, I'm sure, Charles. It's like your delicate mind to make it so clear. I can wait."

"I don't ask to know what you may say, Sophia. That would spoil the beauty of the affair for us both; but I may tell you this. As a woman of means and position, you will have a right to a word about the future. When you marry, whoever it may be, it will be a biggish thing—an event, in fact. And your future would be my first thought and care."

"Same with me, I'm sure. We're not children. Your

wife—when the time comes—can't help knowing she's got a man a good deal above the common run, and she will act according if she's a sensible woman."

"We won't go into more details, then," he declared, "but leave it in that very fine state of uncertainty."

They discussed other things; and when, presently, Mr. Edwards and his daughter drove away in the little wagonette that had brought them, she explained the nature of the understanding, and insisted on the concessions that Mr. Pascoe hinted at and was prepared to consider.

Sophia's father felt interested and satisfied.

"He does things his own way, sure enough; but though queer to the commonplace man, I don't fall out with his way. He knows what's due to you, as he was bound to do, and if he starts in that spirit you can trust yourself to keep him in it."

"I never loved him better than this afternoon," confessed Sophia. "He's a wonderful man."

She was well satisfied; but her father grew gloomy at the thought of his approaching bereavement.

Another somewhat gloomy man trudged on his homeward way at the same hour; or if not actually gloomy, Nathan Mortimer was much mystified. He had chosen Sunday to ascend to Nun's Cross, that he might have some conversation with his nephew. At market there had come to his ears certain startling transactions of Barry's, undertaken and apparently carried through without reference to himself. Barry had long since started a labourer under his own pay at Nun's Cross, and was rearing cattle also. Nathan, therefore, felt the time ripe for remonstrance, or, if that were too strong a word, for investigation. He found Barry and Marian had gone to tea with the Halfyards; but he stopped awhile and enjoyed speech with Jack Bascombe.

"Come to think of it, Jack," he said, "you might do better than him. I don't want to spy on my nephew, or nothing like that; but I do want to hear a bit more about him than he cares to tell me. I'm tenant here, and I've got my interests and his mother's and his aunt's to think upon. And I hear things outside the family that puzzle me."

Bascombe considered.

"Mister Barry's got large ideas," he said, "and we here believe in him and doubt not all's going well. I daresay, if we was to think about the things that happen, we might be puzzled same as you; but we don't waste no time upon them, not being our business. He tells us what he wants us to know and what we must do, and we see what goes on; but how it goes on is nothing for us to consider. So we don't trouble to inquire."

"He's doing a lot on his own, and what I want to know is who is keeping him in the cash. He must be borrowing money, for certain; but what on?"

"I couldn't say. I shouldn't have thought he'd got anything to borrow it on. And yet, no doubt, good money's spending. We reckoned 'twas the family's."

"I may tell you it is not."

"He gets a lot of letters—fat ones—so my wife tells me."

"Where from?"

"I couldn't say."

"Does he go to Plymouth much?"

"Now and again."

"He don't have nothing to do with my lawyer, however, for when I went down to see Mr. Square I asked him, and he said not."

"What be you frightened of if I may ax, Mr. Mortimer?" inquired Baseombe.

"I wouldn't say I was frightened, and don't want to cry out before I'm hurt—or anybody's hurt. But there it is—he's spending money and buying a lot of things * for himself. And first the question is, who's lending that money, and what's the security; and second, I want to know how the man can run Nun's Cross for me if he's so darned busy about his own affairs?"

"Nun's Cross is going on all right. That you know."

"So it is; but I don't want some surprise sprung on me presently. Does he ever speak of the future?"

"He does; but I've never heard him say more than that, when the lease is out, he goes. For a time he talked of renewing on his own. Now he's to be off."

"Never asked you to go with him, or anything like that?

"Yes, he has. It's pretty well settled that if he takes a farm down to the 'in country,' we'll go with him. By

* *Things* Cattle, or sheep.

then it won't be amiss to live in a milder sort of spot for me and Jenny."

"He'll go on farming, then?"

"That's his view at present; but you can't count upon more than one thing with Mister Barry—and that is, he'll try to go higher and higher. He's got a masterful brain and great ambitions, without a doubt."

"'Tis just that sort that oftenest comes a cropper. I'm not a high-handed man, Jack; but, while he's here, I'm his master."

"Certainly you are."

"Then I've a right to know a bit about what he's doing—eh?"

"A bit, yes," admitted Baseombe. "For my part, I'd trust him. But, of course, it don't matter to me what he does, and to you it do matter, because you're the responsible tenant."

"Then you'd say I'd got a right to ask him what he's after?"

"Every right. But I wouldn't say he'd tell you. He's a man that loves mystery, I believe—just like his Uncle David afore him. Pleasant and open as the day in most things, but secret as the grave in others. With me and mine that's natural and we don't want his secrets; but I may tell you that Mrs. Worth—his wife I mean—makes a great friend of Jenny, because she's found out that Jenny's a very understanding woman. And she's confessed to Jenny that she's very much afraid her husband, for all his great prosperity, don't get everything out of life he could wish."

"Ah!" exclaimed Nathan, "now that's going to the root, and that shows that I do well not to be satisfied with things as they are. Secrets he may hide; but there's some secrets he can't—not with a nature naturally open and above board, like he used to be. And if his own wife can feel he don't find his secrets altogether to his taste, then you may be pretty sure, Jack, they wouldn't be to my taste."

"I'm speaking in confidence, however. We've all seen a cloud pass over him now and then; and some days he's the living daps * of his uncle, and it seems like old times to

* *Daps* = Likeness, facsimile.

hear him order us about, and take no denial, and be grim as a ghost, and swear we're all wallowing in idleness and luxury, and such nonsense. But it passes, and most often he's cheerful enough, and always so busy as the devil about something or other."

"You'd say he was making money as well as spending it?"

"I won't venture no opinion on that subject. But, of course, he ought to be."

"I must have a tell with the man," declared Nathan. "You might let him know that I'm wishful to see him, and want him and his wife to come down to tea to-morrow. How much exactly does his wife know about him, I wonder? He's the sort that might keep her outside a good bit."

"And she's the sort to get inside," answered Jack.

He undertook to give Mr. Mortimer's message, and strolled presently through the farmyard with the other. Undoubted prosperity marked it. The place was clean and kept as it had never been. The byres were sweet, the barn and stables in order; all things stood in their places; the machines were well cared for.

"He's a good farmer—wonderful good for such a young man," declared Bascombe, and Nathan could not deny it. He inspected some stock, the property of his nephew.

"He's terrible particular, I must tell you," added Jack. "Everything that's his own, down to the litter, is kept separate, and his man that works here don't touch nought but Mr. Barry's things."

"That's all right; but how comes he by the things?"

Nathan went his way, and on the following evening Marian and Barry arrived at White Works for tea. His uncle had seen Mary since the previous day, and now came armed with a text from her store; for it happened that, seeking information from his sister and finding none, he had yet heard one thing which confirmed Jack Bascombe's statement. Marian and her mother-in-law were intimate and the closest friends. Their supreme interest was Barry, and on one occasion Marian had admitted that her husband cared much for money. "But it don't make him happier," she told Mary, "and the days he puts it behind him and forgets it are his best days."

Uncle and nephew were left alone for a time while Marian and Mrs. Mortimer talked elsewhere, and, lighting his pipe, Nathan endeavoured to probe the situation in so far as it affected himself and the interests he represented. He heard something, but not much, and he soon found that Barry was in no mind to be communicative concerning any of his personal activities.

The elder began with praise.

"I may say I was well pleased up to Nun's Cross," he declared. "You've the making of a farmer, Barry, and I could see with half an eye you move with the times. Now that's a very proper thing for a young man to do, and I'm one of they rare, oldish people that like the rising generation to break out and go ahead. I don't move with the times myself because I've got into a regular way, with manures and rotations and cattle and so on, and my way serves my purpose and will last my time. But I like what you're doing and so do Duchy, for when Mr. Bastard was round here last he went so far as to say you were a good working model for the young farmers; and coming from him that's pretty generous."

Barry nodded.

"Well, what's the matter, then?" he asked.

"I don't say there's anything the matter, and yet again I don't say nothing's the matter. In a word, there seems to be a bit of a mystery in the air, and I'm too old to like mysteries. The young surround themselves with mystery as with a garment nowadays. I daresay they speak plain and tell their secrets to each other, but not to my generation; and God, He knows we don't want their secrets, so long as they be honest ones and the creatures are happy. But, to be plain, I can't understand a few things. You be branching out a good deal and rearing on your own, and must be taking risks."

"No, I'm not—nothing to call risks."

"There must be risk if you're handling other people's money, my lad. And you can't buy geese and ponies and prime young stock without money. Your calves—such a lot of 'em, too—were not give you for a present. Then they wethers—Scotch crossed with Devon long-wools—I know where they came from, and I know what they're worth. And Jack French don't give anything away. He

had his money down, Barry, and I venture to think that I've got a right to know where that money came from."

The other considered.

"I wouldn't say you had," he answered.

"I do think so."

"Why?"

"Well, as to reasons, there's some things so reasonable that you don't feel called to ask for reason. We know that you had to borrow, because you won't take nothing from your mother, nor yet from Aunt Sarah—very rightly. You pay me your rent and you account to me for all expenses at the farm, and get your money from me. 'Tis very fair money, and I mean to better it from next Christmas onwards for the rest of the lease. But the point I'm coming to is this: you must live on your wages, and keep your wife, and pay the man you've took for your business; and when all that's done, there's no cash for speculations at present. So you've borrowed to buy, and you've got to pay for the money you've borrowed, and how do you do it?"

"I've never owed a farthing in my life, Uncle Nathan, and never mean to."

"Good—all good."

"I see my way quite clear, and everything is perfectly satisfactory, and no man's got a word against me."

"Then tell me this—why, instead of being a cheerful and contented chap, are you an anxious and troubled one?"

"Who says I am?"

"Your face and your ups and downs of temper. And more than that, your wife. She's told your mother that it's a very great sorrow to her that you'm so fond of the stuff. And the trouble is that all this money-getting frets you and makes you poor company. You're too young to hide yourself behind yourself, like an older man, and keep the skeleton hid in the cupboard. So 'tis known that, for all your seeming prosperity, you ain't so satisfied as you ought to be. Any why for not?"

"You think I've bit off more than I can chew?"

"I don't know what you've done; I only want to know. I'm wishful to help you if it's in my power. We should all be cruel sorry if you marred your life by being too venturesome at the start."

Barry again considered before he spoke.

"I daresay I do look like that, Uncle Nathan. But you needn't think no more of it. I know what I'm doing all right. However, you've given me a lot of very good advice, and thank you, I'm sure. A man's tempted now and then. Everything's dead right so far; but—well, I'll draw in my horns a bit since you advise it."

"I should if I was you. Luck changes, and 'tis a very dangerous thing to put yourself at the mercy of luck and leave no margin against it."

No more was said, and Barry simulated a more cheerful spirit from that moment, while in the presence of his aunt and uncle. But when he and Marian left them his amiability lessened, and he rated her rather sharply for creating a false impression in the minds of his relations.

"I've heard more'n I wanted to hear, or counted to hear, this evening," he said. "The old man's been trying to pump me about my affairs and given as a reason that I'm changed and glumpy, and surly and troubled in secret. And it seems you told mother I was; and I much wonder you could."

"I didn't say that, Barry. She's always on about you—you being her favourite—and I can't tell lies, can I? I only said you was very fond of money, but that money-getting didn't make you happier."

"It's not the blasted money that makes me—however, I won't have you letting on I'm miserable, or any nonsense like that. I'm all right, and I beg in future, when anybody's impertinent enough to ask, you'll tell 'em so."

"Your own mother, Barry."

"Or anybody's mother. Don't be talking. You know me, and you know what you are to me—everything—everything that matters on this earth. But I'm a busy man and can't be whistling and caddling, and grinning at every fool who wants to waste my time. I look ahead, and that's what you've got to do."

She sighed.

"That's all right for them—not for me. I know there's things on your mind, and I love you so well that I hate to think there's anything on it—anything that's bad—I can't share."

To her surprise he laughed at this.

"I know you as well as you know me," he said, "and if there's anything I don't ax you to share, you may bet I've got a reason. Perhaps you'll know what there is to know some day."

"I don't want to know," she answered. "I don't want to know anything where I can't help."

"That's it. If I was to tell you a thing here and there—you with your ideas and bed-rock honesty to life—Lord knows what would happen."

"Oh, Barry, don't say that! That's as much as to say we don't see alike in what's right and what isn't."

"Well, what of it?"

"I'd be the miserable one if I thought that. What's money against peace of mind?"

"Perhaps if you wasn't what you are, I shouldn't worry," he said.

"I worry you?"

"Not you, but your—there, let it alone. I've got my belly full of this nonsense from Uncle Nathan. Let them yelp who are hurt. And I'm not going to hurt anybody—least of all you. And nobody's going to hurt me. Worse men than me have had monuments put up to 'em, anyway."

"How do I worry you, Barry? You must tell me that, love."

"By being so damned good," he said. "Now you know. You're so stark and clear and awful straight, that you'd worry any man who's playing the game of life with the usual counters."

"Then I'm happy again," she answered. "I'll worry you like that, Barry, till—till—it don't worry you no more!"

"I wonder. Perhaps you will. Perhaps you'll win, perhaps you'll lose—only the devil knows which."

"God knows which, and I know which," she answered.

"Well, the baby's coming, and you'll let me alone then for a bit, I reckon."

"Never; and the baby won't let you alone, neither!"

They were happy enough by the time they returned home.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE OBJECT LESSON

The Plymouth road ascends into the moor between the heights of Hessary to north and south of it, and at the wide gap between them lies that smudge of grey houses known as Princetown. They cluster in a mass and then thin away under North Hessary's mighty green shoulder, where it heaves up through the woodlands planted at its feet. On the fringe of the trees, in a granite house facing north, Damaris Halfyard dwelt, and her married life was only clouded by the fact that no child had as yet rejoiced the heart of Benjamin and herself.

Years had slipped past them swiftly, and not unhappily, save for this disappointment. Damaris had seen others, who wedded with her, the mothers of children, while her own home was silent.

To-day, however, a perambulator stood at her door, for there had come a visitor, and Marian, with a son, now two years old, was calling upon her sister-in-law. They had always been close friends from their childhood, and marriage had not lessened their affection or abated their intimacy.

The day was Sunday, and Damaris prepared to help Marian in a plot. To hear that Marian had a plot amused Mrs. Halfyard not a little; but the elder was quite serious, and now, while the baby sat on his aunt's lap and ate a biscuit, Barry's wife explained.

"You laugh to think as I should hatch a scheme against Barry," she said; "but 'tis a very innocent thought in my mind, Damaris."

"I can't see you doing anything to score off Barry."

"I don't want to, and couldn't if I did. I only want to show him something. He's so quick, he may see what words won't show him. You know my nameless trouble, and I'm never tired of wondering and striving for him."

"I don't know your nameless trouble a bit, Marian,"

answered the other. "If you can't name it, who should know it? We only know that Barry's a very prosperous chap—well thought on and popular. Ben was saying only yesterday that the way Barry stands is a marvel. He's built up a position, and now it's thought he's going to leave these parts, you hear nothing but regrets. And Ben was saying that it's very rare such a prosperous chap shouldn't have more enemies. For there's always plenty to quarrel with a lucky man."

Care was in Marian's eyes as she replied.

"But there's the other side I only whisper to you."

"No need to whisper it, Marian; we all know the other side. He's more a puzzle to us than you, for that matter."

"I can't help him; I can only keep at him. He's two men rolled into one—Barry. The good husband and father, bright as day, cheerful, kindly; and the other. Then he goes dark and impatient and full of something—you can't call it trouble, for sometimes it's a sort of savage happiness that he keeps to himself. I know those days he's had something good happen to him, but not the sort of good he lets me share."

"What good can he hide from you?"

"It isn't good, really—that's what I feel. The real good I share, but these things that happen are not what I think can be good, and he knows I shouldn't; and I'm not sure, for all his light-heartedness, if he feels them to be good really. He's far too difficult for a woman to understand unless he wills to let her. And, meantime, he's getting old for his age in a lot of ways. He'll have fits of suspicion and doubt people who didn't ought to be doubted. It's like as if he came under a secret, bad influence sometimes. Then, just as I take hope and count the days since the last spell and begin to think he's escaped, the fit comes over him again."

"After money and hard on people?"

"I don't know what to call it. That's only a part of the danger. That's what my plot's about to-day. A curious thing happened a week ago. Only I saw it. The post was late, and Barry said the night afore, when I rated him for being so wrapped up in his thoughts, that the morning would bring some very important news for him. He didn't sleep well, and when the postman was late he got niffed

and in a proper fret. Then, looking out the window, I told him the man was in sight, and he strode up and down in the kitchen, where we was alone for the minute, and turned and turned up and down, shorter and shorter, and quicker and quicker, like a hungry animal that knows its dinner be coming. I never saw him give himself away so before. He went out and grabbed the letter, as if it was to save his life, and tore it open like a tiger would tear a sheep, I should think. Then he fed on it, and gave a great gasp. He was going straight up to the room he calls his office without a word, and I said, 'Is it all right, Barry?' But he didn't even hear me, and when he came down an hour later with a letter he'd written and shouted to Samuel to take it to Princetown to catch morning post, I asked him again, and he was quite himself, and said it was all right."

"Poor Marian!"

"I suffered, I can tell you, and when he saw I was a bit under the weather and couldn't help from crying because of the strain, he come to himself and cursed himself and was just himself again—full of shame that he'd troubled me. He said it was a very vital thing indeed and would make a lot of difference to our future. 'Our future': that's what he's always on about; and he seems to think our future is the only thing that matters; but 'tis our present our future hangs upon, Damaris. The passing hour makes our characters, and it's idle for him or anybody to think you can live like he does, year after year, full of secrets, then come to a quiet, happy, open future. Things grow by what they feed on, and he's putting his future on a wrong foundation, like his Uncle David did."

"If he's ruined in his character, it's Uncle David ruined him," said Damaris. "If you only knew how to work out of him what he got from Uncle David——"

Marian nodded.

"Ah, it's a long way easier to plant weeds than to clear the ground once they've seeded," she said. "That's another mystery about Barry. You can't say his uncle did him any good whatever as things fell out. Gave with one hand and took with the other. He only insulted Barry in his will really, and I often ask him why he honours the old man's memory like he does, and never will hear anybody say one word against him. And he still tells me that

David Mortimer was a great man, and it's only thanks to him and his teaching that he stands where he does! Of course, that's nonsense. More like it's the ideas he got from his uncle that make him miserable off and on still. It's what he gets from himself that makes him happy."

"And what he gets from you and his babies."

"He won't argue about it. We had a lot to say about Rosy here. Nobody wanted our first child to be called David, and Uncle Nathan thought it was a name that had better drop out of the family, and so did Barry's mother. But nothing would change him. From the first moment he knew it was a boy, he said it should be called David."

Damaris cuddled the child in her lap.

"He'll never be called so all the same. He'll always be 'Rosy' to us."

The name fitted Marian's little son.

They talked on other subjects; and then came Barry.

He was somewhat changed of late, and looked thinner and harder than of old. In repose a certain sternness of expression sat upon his good-looking face, and his forehead began to line. He seemed restless, but restlessness had grown upon him gradually. He bustled at all times, and even when the day was done, and others in their chairs at rest, he would be on the move, pacing up and down, planning the next day, remembering things, going from room to room. This manner had grown gradually upon him, and it was only on looking back sometimes that the household of Nun's Cross perceived the change and how the unsleeping vitality of the master had impressed itself upon the conditions of life. There were reasons in his methods, however, as Jack Bascombe and Jenny granted. He knew they were growing old and did not much interfere with them, the more so because his wife was now greatly attached to Mrs. Bascombe, the elder; but upon his own generation he had no mercy, and grievances existed at the farm known to his wife, but hidden from Barry. All, however, knew that present conditions at Nun's Cross would end with the termination of the lease. All, therefore, stood by and adapted themselves to the strenuous passing hour.

Now Barry set off with his wife upon the business of a visit she desired him to make, and Rosy was left with

Damaris until they should return in a few hours from a homestead two miles away upon the hills. They talked together, and it might be seen that their attitude to life had widened, and in the man's case hardened, at certain angles. He expressed rather grim satisfaction at a recent incident.

" I met old Caunter down the village, and he let slip what I've long wanted to hear. Make a man angry—that will tell you more about him than making him drunk even. Nought blabs like anger. I'd fear to trust a man who was never angry ; he'd be too deep for me, Marian."

" You can't get much out of an angry man that's worth knowing, all the same. Whoever heard of you angering people, my dear ? "

" I don't go out of my way to do it. There's very few got any reason to be angered with me, and, if they have, it's their own fault, not mine. It shows you're somebody if you get people vexed now and again. The sort that never flutter anybody don't count."

" The old are a bit envious of the young sometimes, and a bit jealous of the respect and consideration paid to them. Perhaps you don't grant enough to the older generation."

" That's all right ; but you can't ask a man like me to show respect and consideration where I feel neither. Old people are so often old fools—you can't deny it."

" You must allow for their experience. There isn't any such valuable knowledge as that built on experience."

" Their experience belongs to the past, and that's dead and gone. Uncle Nathan for one and your father for another—they're like old, mildewed books written for a past generation and no manner of use to this one. The old look back ; the young look ahead if they're worth a damn ; and when I see a chap looking back, I know he'll soon be no more use."

" You mustn't take yourself too seriously all the same, Barry."

" I don't," he said. " I don't take myself seriously at all ; but I'll take mighty good care other people shall."

Marian laughed.

" They do, I'm sure. Never was a man more respected or deserved to be. Your bark's worse than your bite, and few enough ever hear your bark. Have you made up with

Little Jack? Jane tells me he's been a lost cast down because he made a mistake, and got the rough edge of your tongue. He's sensitive and means so well. Perhaps you were a bit hard on him, don't you think?"

"Didn't intend to be. You don't want a flail to beat the air. A straw will do that. Sorry if he's got a grievance. I think a lot of him—like a good horse, always willing."

They reached their destination presently—a farm lifted up in a thicket of trees, near Two Bridges. Here dwelt a widower and his son—kinsmen of Marian's through her mother. Mrs. Dennis saw Mr. Baird sometimes, but he was a lonely and unapproachable man, without friends. He seldom travelled in the direction of Princetown; but his son, Robert Baird, came oftener and belonged to a different sort of beings. The life at this uplifted homestead was sordid and the conditions mean, for Baird belonged to the order of David Mortimer; and it was for this reason that Marian desired Barry, if possible, to make the acquaintance of her relative. She had a thought that the picture might cast light on some of her husband's opinions and ambitions. It was a crude notion and a rather dangerous experiment, yet worth making, so Marian believed. But while the event did not bring Barry and the old man together, it none the less served its purpose indirectly. It also showed, what did not need showing, that Barry Worth could no more see himself from an impartial standpoint than any other living being can do so.

They met Robert Baird at the entrance to the farm. He was a dour-looking young man, and he wore his working clothes, for the seventh day meant nothing here.

"Wonders never cease," he said; "but my old boy ain't taking any; he don't like people who invite themselves to tea."

"Why didn't he tell me, then, and we wouldn't have come," Marian answered.

"He wasn't going to waste a penny stamp telling you. He's out on the moor. But you'd best to drop in and have a drink afore you tramp back. I'll run to that. He wonders why the deuce you wanted to look him up."

They entered an untidy kitchen and sat down. There were no signs of tea, a meal Mr. Baird omitted from his

bill of fare; but Robert offered them cider, and Barry, who knew him well enough, refused.

"No, thanks," he said. "I can guess the belly-vengeance stuff your father drinks. We'll wait till Marian's rested a bit; then we'll get back to civilisation and a cup of tea."

Robert laughed.

"I expect it looks a bit of a fox's den to your eyes, Marian. But there's more here than you see. Barry knows that them that live hardest ain't always the poorest. The old dog have got a few bones hidden, if I know anything."

The visitor was interested.

"So they tell me," she answered.

"Yes—money's his god, as the saying is. He just scrimps for the pleasure of piling up what another will spend. But it's hard work waiting. He's got one foot in the grave, however, and the other will go after soon, I hope."

"Robert! You didn't ought to speak like that of your father," said Marian.

"Blast my father!" replied Robert, very heartily. "I've been cursed from my youth up by my father, and I hate the old wolf worse than you hate sin. He can't last much longer, and that's the only good thing I know about him. He thinks he's broke me, soul and body; but he hasn't. You're understanding creatures, and so I can say it; I'm only here for what must come when he's dead. Then the money he's lived like a beast to make will be in my pocket, and I shall begin to be a human being."

They listened to the concentrated bitterness of the slave, and Marian wondered secretly, for it seemed to her that Robert Baird could hardly have provided a more tremendous lesson had Providence inspired his every sentiment. It was all here in a nutshell—the manifold evils and the dangers. Their host indicated the ruin of his parent, and also the disaster of his environment to himself. His thoughts were mean, his hopes futile, his ambitions for the future worthless. What his father had earned like a beast, he promised to spend like one. Bondage had ruined him, and the time to come, that he relied upon for happi-

ness, could never bring it until vastly different forces were brought to bear upon his character. Even so it might be too late for lasting influence now.

"D'you know what he said when he got your letter asking if you might walk over with your husband and drink a dish of tea, Marian?" asked Robert, as Barry rose and declared they must be going.

She shook her head.

"He said, 'Ah, the eagles be after the carcase! She be getting a family, and thinks it's time she curried favour.' That's what he said."

Barry laughed.

"One for him, then. You tell him my wife called for friendship, nought else, and that we have only had the use of two of his chairs for half an hour. Marian don't want any of his savings. You've earned them, and I hope it won't be long before you get 'em, Bob."

"I hope it won't. Christ knows I deserve 'em."

He accompanied Barry and Marian to the precincts of the farm, filled his pipe from the other man's pouch, and promised some day to visit Nun's Cross.

"I was there once," he said, "when your uncle lived. He and my father clashed once and only once, and your old devil got the best of it; and after he died, my father told me he went out of his road so far as Princetown churchyard—just for the pleasure of spitting on David Mortimer's grave. That's my father."

Marian shivered, and her husband said nothing. They went a mile of the homeward way without speech. Then she ventured an opinion.

"I couldn't have believed money would ruin a man like it's ruining Robert."

"'Tis the waiting and hating his father that's ruined him—not the money. He hasn't got the money yet."

"But his father—no better than a savage, seemingly."

"A poor brain."

"It's always a poor brain that lets money rule it."

"I can understand Robert Baird," said Barry. "But he's had to wait too long. That money will be over-ripe time he gets it. He won't know how to spend it, for he knows the value of nought."

"We've seen the same in your family. What ought to

be a blessing turns out a trouble, if there's no knowledge how to use a thing."

He did not answer, and she spoke again.

"Oh, if money could be done away with, and us all worked like the bees for one another, and not for pay! Every bee-butt shows you a better plan than our plan. They can't be greedy nor selfish, for there's nought to be greedy or selfish about, because the good of the bee is the good of the hive."

"That's a dream. We haven't reached that yet. 'Look after yourself, and the devil take the hindmost'—that's the human rule. And if you're a human you've got to follow it, or get left."

"It leads to horrors like what we've seen. If I thought your son would ever speak of you like Robert spoke of his father, I'd go out of my mind."

"And well you might. Rosy will never have no call to want me underground—not while you're awake. There's a pretty good gulf between my future and old Baird's present."

If anything, her experiment affected Marian more than her husband. Her it troubled and cast down considerably; but it appeared to leave very little impression upon him. In fact, the contrast between himself and the unseen veteran rather cheered him. He dwelt on the difference and explained, as so often before, that he saved for power, not cash. Marian learned, however, at a later time that the experience had not left Barry uninterested. He returned to it, and succeeded in getting Robert to visit them and learn further of his trials. But it was Mr. Baird's rule of life and methods of money-making that interested Barry rather than poor Bob's afflictions, the poverty of his home, and the still greater poverty of his ambitions for the future.

Now they returned hungry to Princetown, ate and drank with Ben and Damaris, and in the dusk set out for home. Barry pushed the perambulator, and they exchanged friendly words with an acquaintance or two, who stopped to admire the baby.

Then they walked the moor together, and at dusk viewed the grey cluster of Nun's Cross and the sentinel symbol lifting beside it.

"Our home's like heaven after that nightmare," declared Marian. Then Barry laughed, and revealed that he had seen through her modest plot.

"And you wanted to show me where I was heading for —eh, my fine girl? But you was like the little boy, who set out with a lantern and sheet to terrify the grown-up folk, and ended by frighting none but himself."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE NEW GENERATION

Sophia Edwards had duly received her proposal of marriage on the appointed date, and duly accepted it. No great measure of romance attended the betrothal and speedy nuptials; but complete success might be said to have followed for both parties. Charles was happier and more established in his faith than ever he had been. Indeed, the past must soon have sunk under the horizon of his life had not circumstances combined daily to remind him of it. Even so memory began to grow dim, and already he held the experience of his first marriage as the darkness without which there can be no light; for, as he said to Sophia in his sententious way, "you can't appreciate what marriage may be until you also know what marriage may be." The past, in fact, represented error on his part; but the sting had gone from it now; Charles was at peace with himself again; and he only alluded with placid sorrow to the vanished days, that Sophia might commend him for patience under tribulation.

As for her, she found her husband a man in every way satisfying; one on whom she could depend—steadfast and sensible. He had repeated his opinion that Sophia must have much to say in the conduct of their united life; but she raised no present opposition to the old paths, and found that Strane Steps satisfied all her requirements for the early days of marriage. It was a restful and pleasant place after the shop; nor were her great gifts of energy and organisation wasted in the machine-like stability of Mr. Pascoe's system. She proved of great service in many practical ways; she enlarged the views of Charles in financial directions, and she made it clear that, presently, they must both prepare for wider activities than those represented by her husband's farm.

More important than all else, Sophia occupied herself with the business of a family. She set about this matter in her usual steadfast spirit immediately, and Fate smiling, the anniversary of their wedding day saw a son born to Charles. Another year achieved a second son, and now Sophia anticipated a third child. Her husband rejoiced, and declared that, for the open and honest mind, there could be no difficulty in justifying the ways of God to man.

Rebecca Pascoe, however, found herself faced with prevenient anxieties. It became more than ever apparent that Strane Steps might presently do without her. She was suffering a good deal from rheumatism and losing her powers of work. No immediate danger threatened, but she feared that, when the time of disablement arrived, she would be expected by Sophia to go elsewhere. Nor would Charles be likely to set his judgment against his wife's. He was growing gradually under her dominion. He did not perceive it, but the fact appeared very plain indeed to his aunt.

Problems, therefore, faced her, though they did not demand immediate solution.

Anstice was sunk into the shadow of a shade, and none now even assumed a melancholy intonation when uttering her name. The focus of interest was the brace of baby boys, and Rebecca grew concerned for a second reason now, because she observed that Charles, whose life and soul centred in his sons—Charles the second, and his brother, Rupert—began to grow indifferent to the claims of his daughter. Miss Pascoe could not blame him for any explicit act, but perceived that small Anstice—a child that seemed as shadowy as a moth, in mind and body, contrasted with the assertive vigour and high colouring of her half-brothers—did not attract Charles, or arride him, or twine round his heart-strings. She never had done so, and never could. The girl exhibited her mother's eyes and her mother's contented, gentle spirit. Mrs. Pascoe failed in no particular of duty, but she was not attached to the child, and had no affection to spare for her. She found her uninteresting, and conscience in this matter was the more easily salved by the circumstance of such a devout worshipper for Anstice

that Mrs. Pascoe felt no need to make any division of love between her own children and the first.

Rebecca watched, and found what was painful to her. It seemed that Sophia, in a thousand subtle ways, by words of detraction, by slightings, by regrets at faults, tended to change the attitude of Charles to his daughter. The operation proceeded so gradually that Miss Pascoe believed neither her nephew nor his wife herself was aware of it. She did not even accuse Sophia of any deliberate attempt to lessen her husband's love for his daughter; but the thing surely happened, and Charles became a little hard, a little exacting, where Anstice was concerned. He explained his purpose to his aunt when she once ventured to doubt his judgment.

"I am surprised that you can criticise me," he said. "You must always remember that the mother is a dominating influence in her offspring, Aunt Rebecca; and I also have to remember that, and do what I can to correct certain errors of character in my daughter which must appear, and for which I am not responsible, I believe. Far from being unreasonable, it is the height of reason to do this. She will bless me for it. And her dear mother would do the same. Very possibly she does. I owe my little Anstice a careful upbringing as a duty and obligation."

"She's Sophia's duty, and no more," said the old lady. "She ought to be something besides a duty to you, if I may say so, Charles."

"And so she is—my first-born. Can a man forget his first-born? Sophia is a disciplinarian, and so am I, and Anstice is growing up too colourless, too devoid of character. It is our purpose to develop her character. Anstice is fearful and timid—for no reason. One wants to make her brave."

"Her brothers will help to make her brave. I never yet heard of anybody talk of making a baby brave," said Miss Pascoe. "Especially a girl baby," she added.

Her attitude of uncritical admiration had a little failed Miss Pascoe of late years where her nephew was concerned. The reason was apparent, for whereas, in the past, she had sustained him in all things, and been a ready fountain and flow of sympathy and admiration, now he

came no longer to her for any support. She knew he did not care for her as of old, and she reacted accordingly.

The situation, however, with respect to Charles's daughter was largely modified by the devoted friend and slave of Anstice already mentioned; and, if at any time her father had been prepared to doubt his own attitude to his daughter, consideration of James must have strengthened his conviction of right. For the position of James was peculiar. It had developed gradually, and events had combined to develop it. What must have looked surprising three years ago was now an accepted and accomplished fact, and James actually came and went from Strane Steps as a part of the institution. He had slipped into a relation with the child of dead Anstice that never seemed probable, yet happened owing to various causes. His own amazing obstinacy was one; but this had not served him against the greater obstinacy of Charles. The determining factor was Mrs. Pascoe, who had always liked James, and who found that his affection for Anstice proved a very great convenience to herself. She saw no objection in his attachment, and even declared that it was a moving and beautiful thing. James, in fact, had grown to be a sort of superior nurse-maid, dedicated to the service of Anstice. He spent a very great deal of his time in her company, and, since Mrs. Pascoe was never called to spare a thought to the child on these occasions, she encouraged the ministry of James, and easily proved to her husband that such an arrangement was desirable.

"It pleases James, and it rests me, and gives me all the more time to the boys," she would say. "Anstice gets nothing but good from him, and the child is very much attached to James. In fact, she's at her best with James, and he's an excellent influence for any young thing."

At first, however, Charles had not approved. It was impossible that he could like James, nor did he forget the tragic day on which he had displayed himself to James as none other had ever seen him. He remembered the occasion with pain more acute than he remembered the cause of it; but he hoped James had forgotten. As a matter of fact, James read Pascoe in the light of his own opinions and unwavering devotion. He held

Charles to be a weak man, much like others; he had ceased to hate him, but he felt indifferent to his criticism, and was very sure that her father did not in reality care for Anstice or spare her any affection. He was always civil and courteous to Charles: but, having won the support of Sophia, he adopted a secret arrogance of mind, heartily despised Pascoe for marrying again, and believed his own sacred dedication to the memory of Anstice and the love of her little girl greater emotions than any the other man had power to feel or cherish.

Gradually Charles came to accept the presence of James. He had long ceased to deprecate his visits or oppose his attention to Anstice. It certainly worked for the convenience of Sophia. He told himself that a time must come when Anstice would find the companionship of her father and brothers more attractive than that of the melancholy man in whom she now took delight. He felt sure that in the future, when her intelligence developed, she must relegate James to the position of a well-meaning friend; but for the present he accepted the situation, nor perceived that daily Anstice became more of a silent shadow in her home, seen against the exuberant solidity and increasing assertion of her brothers. The situation was debated elsewhere than at Strane Steps, also; but none troubled about it, for his own family knew that the child made his life's first purpose for James.

The only fear of Mary and Sarah was that it could not last; while as for Nathan and his wife, they were content, and hoped that presently James might prove a useful friend to their granddaughter.

There came a long summer day when James obtained complete control of Anstice from morning until the twilight. It was a public holiday, and he had planned to spend it at Nun's Cross, as had happened once or twice on previous occasions. On such a day Jane Bascombe devoted herself to the babies, and presided over a company of four. James had bought a very special vehicle for Anstice, a little cart on springs, made by Ben Halfyard to his design. In this James was content to play pony, and the child loved better than anything her journeys thus taken. He arrived for his treasure now, and found her eager for his coming, in a white frock with blue bows and

a white satin bonnet. The go-cart also awaited him. It was in the pattern of a little gig.

Charles and his wife and aunt witnessed the start. The man made some perfunctory acknowledgment.

"Don't you spoil her, James, and don't let her eat too much. Uncommonly kind of you; but I know that it gives you pleasure," he said.

"She's the only pleasure I've got, and the greatest I can have, so you needn't thank me," answered the other.

They set off, Anstice in a joyful humour; and Charles disappeared to prepare for his own holiday. He was to drive his wife to Ashburton, where she would visit friends while he spent some hours at an agricultural show. Rebecca was well content to stop at home and mind her great-nephews.

"How she chirps up the minute she sets her eyes on James," said Miss Pascoe to her niece.

Sophia admitted it.

"One of they mysteries," she answered. "And yet not much of a mystery, if we knew all, I daresay. Anstice is her poor mother again, as I remember her."

"She is—all her mother—gentle, mild and meek. Yet happy by nature. I often wonder how such a girl stamped herself so strong upon her child and Charles was left out of her."

"So do I," admitted Sophia. "I suppose it may be because his first wife's mind was always turning to James, and he was in her thoughts more than ever her husband was."

Miss Pascoe flushed.

"I don't think you ought to say that, Sophia, even if you think it."

"Why not, Aunt Rebecca? It's nature. I don't say it unkindly. Little Anstice might be Jimmy's own. She's far, far more like him than ever she'll be like Charles. I see her mother looking out of her eyes all the time; and so does he; and it's depressing, and gives me the creeps oftener than you know. Mistakes have to be made by the wisest, and nobody loving Charles like we do will deny his first wife was a mistake; but, though time and chance will often help each other to banish mistakes and

forget them, this mistake can never be forgot, because the result of it is always under our eyes to remind us."

The other granted this.

"Mind you," added Mrs. Pascoe, "I wouldn't say that to anybody—not to Charles himself would I say it; but I can to you, because you know there's no bitterness in me. I couldn't even like the child much, because she'll grow up the sort I do not like—the sort that are helpless and can't help the world along; but, just for that reason, I'm watchful over myself, and extra careful to be kind and gentle with her. And when I fail I'm sorry and try to do better."

"It's the same with Charles—a fairer man don't live; yet he, too, feels a bit of disappointment in his own way to miss the Pascoe out of her. Thank God, there's lots of Pascoe in the boys."

"She's our cross—to say it kindly," declared Sophia, "and as such we must suffer her."

Miss Pascoe felt it an apt moment to hint at ideas long dormant in her mind.

"I've wondered sometimes if it would be a happy thing if I was to take Anstice and go and live somewheres else," she said.

In Sophia's opinion nothing happier could possibly occur; but she did not say so.

"No, no; we mustn't talk of any great upheaval like that yet," she answered. "The future will declare itself. We'll go into it some other day. But don't you name it to him, for he'd be sorry. He's properly fond of you, as you well know; and so am I. There may be great changes in a few years, for my father's not what he ought to be, and it might happen that Charles was called to other work. But all's hid in the future."

Rebecca was gratified, and felt content to leave the matter so. A third child would be added to her nephew's quiver in the following year, and she guessed that after that advent, her ideas might commend themselves to all at Strane Steps.

Meantime, James climbed the moor with his happy burden and presently arrived at Nun's Cross to find the farm in holiday humour. Jack Bascombe and his son had gone to Tavistock, and Jenny had accompanied them;

Barry was for the moment in his business room, and Marian and Jane were playing with Rosy, his sister, Mary Ann—named after her grandmothers—and Jane's own boy, christened after the family name. But whereas his grandfather was 'Jack' and his father 'Little Jack,' the first arrival of a new generation had been addressed as 'Johnny' from his birth.

Anstice joined the party, and permitted each babe in turn to take a drive in her chariot; then James and Marian left the children, and he sat and talked to her while she prepared the midday meal.

He was full of little Anstice, and she listened, well content to see him happy.

"More and more like her dear mother she grows," he said.

Marian asked presently after the other Pascoe children, and was sorry that she had done so, for the question brought a cloud into the face of James.

"They're all right, I believe—just a pair of ordinary, little, noisy boys. And Charles spoils 'em and let's 'em do as they please."

"They're too young to begin to train yet, Jimmy."

"So's Anstice too young; but he can't see that she's the top flower of the bunch and worth a thousand of the others. Sometimes it's all I can do to keep from saying a word."

"Don't you do that—it's not your business. Charles is sure to be just."

"I endure it because, if I didn't, I should be fired out, very like," confessed James. "He's a man like other men, and not sure to be just any more than anybody's sure to be just. No stronger than the rest of us is Charles; but I keep what I know about him hidden."

"He's properly fond of his little girl, I'm sure."

"Why are you sure? You've got nothing to make you sure. In my eyes it's often no better than a cat and a mouse between Charles and Anstice. You know how a cat lets a mouse go and turns his back on it and pretends he's forgot it; and the poor creature takes breath and makes another dash, only to have the cat's paw on his back in a moment. Charles properly preaches the joy of life out of Anstice, and he uses silly words to her no young child

would understand. And she don't understand, and her mouth goes down like a davered flower while he rolls on."

Marian laughed at the picture, but assured James that he need not fear.

"She's a happy little mite by nature, and he won't make her unhappy. You can't make people unhappy, James, if they're born to be happy. Nature's stronger than surroundings. She's like her mother—cheerful, same as me. Fathers are all the same. They fool a child one minute, then suddenly draw in and pull a long face and start to rebuke it, when so often as not they ought to rebuke themselves. A father brings his mood to his child and smiles and spoils it one minute if his own star is up; and then the next, when things ain't going so well with him, he'll take a different line. Mothers be more steadfast. You'll understand that, for I'm sure you're like a mother yourself."

Barry joined them. He was in good spirits and a holiday temper. He treated James kindly, but as a mental inferior. Even when James mentioned a passing sore subject, Barry did not take it very seriously. They spoke of Nathan Mortimer, and his nephew asked if he had gone to Ashburton.

"He has not," answered James. "He's a bit under the weather, and his new false teeth have set up an inflammation, and he ain't going to pay for them till they're put right, on the advice of his wife."

James had ceased to speak of his Aunt May, and always referred to her as his uncle's wife. What capacity for hate there was in his nature she absorbed.

"He's vexed with you, too," added James. "He says you pay him less and less respect as your time grows shorter up here."

"I pay him his rent anyway, and he's made a damned sight more out of Nun's Cross than I have," answered Barry lightly. "He's growing old and cranky. Why should he want respect if I don't feel any?"

"He's lived with that hard, selfish wretch for thirty years, and he'd have been a very different man if he'd married a different woman, I reckon."

"She's a terror," admitted Barry, "but she's harmless now. Mother was saying that even Uncle Nathan goes

his own way more than he did. If he had his way here he'd be the loser all round, and my little finger knows more of progress than his whole head. We trust the wine of life to the old bottles too long, and, when they burst, a lot is spilled that might have been worth keeping."

It was a remark that showed how Barry's thoughts flowed in deeper channels than of old; but James felt doubtful.

"Change is in the air, and very wise people don't always trust it. We may turn into a company next year, or the next. Mr. Edwards is going to retire, he tells me, for his health is vexing him a good bit. But he'll keep his eye on it, and he'll want to leave everything in the old bottles, as you call 'em, so long as he can."

"More fool him."

"Shall you stop on if it's a company, James?" asked Marian.

"You'd best not speak of it as a thing decided. Edwards half wants it to happen; but Mrs. Pascoe does not. I shall stay if they wish it. But I daresay a company would think I belong to the old paths and wouldn't need me. A few things may happen next year, in any case."

Then Barry made a curious remark that interested his wife more than his brother.

"A good many things may happen next year," he prophesied. "In fact, it may be a year of wonders."

"Every year's wonderful, in my opinion," answered James. "Nothing stands still, because everybody wants to be happier, and those who think they've got half a chance of being so, do what they can to bring it about. 'Tis strange what ceaseless trouble people can take after happiness, and yet we know that for ninety-nine in a hundred it will never be more than a wild-goose chase."

"Part of human nature, James," answered the younger man. "A sort of dumb instinct, same as takes the dusty, driven beast to the greenest side of the highway hedge."

"And we hope, even if we can't be happier, our children shall be," added Marian.

After dinner there fell out a bright incident for James, because Marian suddenly remembered a picture that she had put by.

"It is an old photograph of her—Anstice. I found it

at the bottom of a box of odds and ends I was clearing out last week. She must have given it to Barry, or else Damaris, years ago."

James delighted in the picture and knew all about it.

"It was took when she was sixteen," he said. "I remember the time very well, and I've been wishing for that one for my album for years. How I lost my copy I don't know. Nobody kept it, seemingly, and I'd given up hope. She was took five times in her life, and this is the third. Particular good, in my opinion. Now I've got all five photos, thank God. This is a red-letter day, sure enough."

They had seldom seen him so elated.

"Sometime I'm going to have them all enlarged," he said. "It can be done very near as large as life; and they can even paint them in colours, which would be better still if the colours were right. I could tell them to a shade, of course."

The day passed without a cloud, and at sundown, once more expressing his thanks for Marian's gift, James set off, pulling the little cart and the little girl in it.

Barry's wife looked rather tearfully after the mournful figure.

"He's getting a bit round in the back, is James," said Barry.

"A sad sight to me always—Jimmy and that dear child."

"Why?" asked her husband. "It's mawkish and molly-coddly and pitiful of the poor man, but not particular sad. He gets his only joy along with her—she being her mother's child."

"And isn't that sad?"

"No. It's the best luck that can be hoped for him now—the best that he wishes for himself."

"He goes through the world like a ghost."

"A twilight sort of man, sure enough. A stream dammed and too weak to break out into a new channel."

Then she asked the question that had been on her tongue since the morning.

"Whatever did you mean when you told Jimmy that next year was to be a year of wonders?"

"I thought you wouldn't miss that! Not too sure

what I did mean ; and yet that's a lie, too, for I know what I mean all right. I know now what I mean; but I may change before next year comes. Jimmy's right—every year brings its own wonders."

" Talk sense, my dear man. Who could make top or tail of that rummage ? Tell me what you meant."

" You're a patient girl," he answered, in a placid mood, rare with him. " And I daresay your patience will be rewarded presently. I've about reached the point where something's got to go. There's another riddle. Yes, you'll come out top, as you deserve to do. Your work's not wasted, though I daresay you think it is. But a man can't live with you four years and be the same as he was. These things will explain themselves very like. I'm not talking rummage but sense, and I'm in an open mood to-night, you see. Perhaps I'm saying things that I'd deny to-morrow ; but don't forget I've said 'em, Marian—don't forget ; and next time I'm damning everybody and worrying the life out of you, remember, for all my noise, you'll have the last word. I didn't think you would, once. But now, at the back of my mind, I know you will. I'm not particular glad and I'm not particular sorry : I only know it will happen."

She seldom remembered him to have spoken quite so frankly, and yet, despite the open manner, the matter was a mystery.

" I'd like to think I'd influenced you all these years if you could say you were the better for my influence, Barry. But not else. I don't want no last word. You've done a mighty deal for me and made my mind a lot larger than ever it was, and I'm thankful to you ; but unless I could do to you, too, what made you grateful, I'd far rather do nought. But you say you're not particular glad, and if you're not, then that robs the thought of pleasure for me. You know I'd be very sorry to influence you away from your happiness."

" No, you wouldn't," he said, tenderly enough. " No—you wouldn't be sorry—not if you knew exactly what you had done. It's like this. A man's mind is the same as the soil of a farm—it varies. There's good, generous soil ; there's tough, unyielding clay ; there's marsh and there's stones. And what will do well in one place will fail in

another, and where rushes are flourishing, corn will not. And there's some soil in my mind where the grain you sow does all right; and there's other soil where the crops look good to me, though you might think them weeds. And now it's thus with me: I'm doubtful here and there what to pull up and what to let grow. D'you understand all that?"

"Yes, I think so," she said. "It's no credit to good seed to do well in good ground; but the seed that's strong enough to crowd out the weeds—who wouldn't pray for that?"

"My doubt is what are weeds," he explained; and then she, in her turn, astonished him.

"Never, Barry! Don't you pretend that. You're in no more doubt what are the weeds inside you than you are what are the weeds of the earth. Of that I'm positive sure—positive sure. You know right and wrong as well as you know the meaning of figures. You're far, far too clever a man to be in doubt about weeds; and every heart knows its own weeds, and only a fool pretends to himself they're not weeds, even though he's not strong enough to pull them up."

"If so," he said, "then all the more certain is it that I spoke truth to James. A year of wonders for all of us—and dangers, too—disasters even. There is a doubt about weeds all the same, young Marian. You're not everybody, to know at sight the difficult and doubtful things. And mind this, what's a weed in one heart may be a precious herb in another."

She considered, but would not grant so much.

Anstice was asleep before she reached her home, and James lifted her out of her cart and handed her to Miss Pascoe.

Charles and his wife had not yet returned, but Rebecca thanked the faithful one.

"What we should do without you I can't think, nowadays, James. She's been good?"

"Good as gold—a very happy day she's had."

"And you, too, I hope?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

He went off, and presently locked himself into his room

and lighted a candle. For, as Barry would bolt his door on the world, so sometimes would James. The elder had his treasures, even as the younger had, and hid them as jealously from sight and knowledge. For James, his cherished possessions, upon which he had long fastened with the heart of a miser, were memorials of a dead woman. Little handkerchiefs, a pair of shoes, bows, trinkets, artificial flowers and dead ones pressed in a hymn-book, photographs, fragments of worthless things, a garment or two, a pinch of wood-dust that had come from the floor after they screwed her coffin—such were his dear possessions. The hoard had grown slowly, year by year—and still little things were added—as to-day. It had become a paramount motive and occupation with him. Sometimes he handled one thing and sometimes another; and, when he did so, his face grew bright and his lips moist, as he exhibited a sort of shadowy sensuality or ghostly debauch. To-night he went through the whole collection as a beautiful end to his good day; and he added the new photograph, after kissing it.

An hour passed in this manner; then he locked up his box, put it away, and went down to his mother, who had already called him to supper. None knew of this secret museum, or the delight that attended any addition thereto; but even these priceless relics were as nothing to the blessed manifestation of the dead revealed in her child. Upon the little one James poured out the full flood of his spiritual disappointments and physical devotion. She was more real to him than his own life and all the rest of his fellow-creatures put together. Indeed, he excused his hoard to his own reason by telling himself that these things must become heirlooms of inestimable value to small Anstice when she was old enough to appreciate them.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE FRINGE OF THE MYSTERY

Little Jack came with a message from his master to Nathan Mortimer. On the way he thought his own thoughts, and since, after any private reflection, he generally opened his mouth to the first listener, he spoke now to the farmer, and uttered more than his mission.

"Winter's coming again, Little Jack," said Nathan, as the young man knocked at the door, then entered the kitchen.

"So it is," answered he, "and a very wintry thought I had walking down along. And what I say is, that the least of us loves our little bit of credit, and even a farm dog feels the better for a pat on the back if he's done something to earn it."

"Very true. Quite a thinker you're coming to be."

"But, if you don't get your earned reward, then you fret," continued Little Jack. "You fret because your sense of justice is put out o' bias. Of course, there's some so witty that they be always winning the world's praise, and good words to them are so common as feathers on a goose; but such as me don't often earn praise, though I may hunger for it as much as anybody; and if by chance I fairly win it and don't get it, then I feel very put about."

"Sometimes a good deed will miss praise for not being known—remember that," answered Mr. Mortimer. "Often a man will do a very fine thing with no eye on him but his Maker's; and, if such a man don't tell what he's done, then the deed's lost for this world; and he must wait to hear about it till the next, where no secrets are hid. Perhaps that's how it was with you?"

"No," answered the labourer, "I didn't do nothing that you could fairly ax to be carried into the next world. In fact, nothing for me to name again; and yet 'twas more than nothing, also—though it came to nothing, I

grant. Yes, in honesty, I must allow nothing came of it. But the will did ought to be taken into account, and, even if you don't carry a thing through and bring it off in triumph, which you can't expect often from an every-day man like me, still the good intention was there, and Mister Barry saw it with his own eyes."

"You may look at a thing and not see it, however," answered Nathan. "You must always remember that, Little Jack. My nephew's eyes might have been upon you, and yet his mind might have been withdrawn in his head, busy about higher matters. I've known Mrs. Mortimer sometimes to sit looking in my face at six feet range, and yet, all the time, she's not been seeing me; and, as for myself, it's a common experience with me nowadays to pass a man and not give him 'Good-day,' from no rudeness, but just owing to the way my intellects turn in on themselves. Be sure you're not undervalued."

Whatever the mysterious deed Little Jack had attempted, he dropped the subject now.

"It's his birthday, Friday," he explained, "and he's a deal set on having the whole family to tea, if they'll come. And I be here with the invite. His wife wanted him to write a letter; but he said there was no need, and you would have no objection to me bringing the message by my mouth."

Nathan consulted May, who had listened to this conversation. As of old, she resented Barry's methods. She hesitated now, and her husband reminded her of facts.

"It's about the last time he'll offer to give a tea-party at Nun's Cross, I should think. He'll be gone before next year—at least, I suppose he will. So we'd best to accept."

For now it was known that Nathan's nephew would not renew the lease of the Duchy farm. His future plans, however, he chose to keep a secret for the present. Not even Marian knew them, so it was believed.

"We'll be there, then," said May.

Little Jack proceeded to Miss Mortimer, and Sarah was glad to get her invitation. She asked after her godchild, Rosy, and Little Jack believed him to be well.

"There's a sort of feeling in the air that Mister Barry is soon going to let out his plans to everybody," he told her,

" so we're all a good bit interested, because my family is going with him anywhere in reason, if it's to be farming. That's understood."

" And I've got a bit of news for them," said Miss Mortimer. " I've had a difficult problem in my mind for some days, and now I see my way out. I daresay there will be more surprises than one."

Barry's birthday arrived, and all his immediate relations came to tea. He had of late years become a subject of interest almost as absorbing as his Uncle David before him ; and he was more indifferent to the fact than Marian, who wearied of the eternal questions showered upon her.

Nathan indicated the situation as he walked between Barry's mother and his own wife to Nun's Cross.

" We may hear all what he's chosen to hide, or we may never hear," he said ; " but this we know, that my nephew's handling bigger things than Nun's Cross now, and taking his place in a world hidden from our eyes. I don't say it's not a perfectly respectable world ; but I do say it's hidden from us. Money can't be hid to the seeing eye. The owning of money gives a man away despite himself, and when he's got it, he can't hide himself from understanding people, even if he wants to. Not that Barry tries to hide. The days of the old mysteries are ended, when he used to buy sheep and cattle, and I worrited to know how he'd come by the money, and he wouldn't tell me. Now what he buys, or don't buy, I cannot tell ; I only know that he's come by the confident behaviour that goes with money ; and he talks and thinks and acts like a man of means thinks and talks. You always know a well-to-do man from a poor one by his power to look ahead. The properly poor can't look ahead, for it's hand to mouth with them ; but when people talk of what will be happening to 'em in a year's time, then you know they are solid men. Why your son should hide his property from us, of course we can't tell, Mary. One don't think the better of him for it, for no man ever had kindlier relations, I'm sure."

" His own wife don't know any more than we do," answered Mary. " But Barry mustn't be judged. We've all got our own habits of mind; he's a good son and an upright character."

"Nothing excuses him for being stuck up to all of us, however," said May Mortimer.

"I wouldn't say he ever was stuck up," replied Barry's mother; "that's not a fair word to use."

"Yes, May's right," declared Nathan, "It's not rudeness on his part, nor anything intended to be rude. It's just that his mind is moving on a different plane, where we've got no place. If, when people talk to you, they show you that you don't interest them, and that you and your affairs are a small matter alongside their greater business, you can't help marking it. And coming from Barry to us, so much his elders, that's stuck up; and it also shows that he's got more irons in the fire than he cares to tell us about. For my part, I've long given up wanting to know about him, and I only did want to know for his own sake, that my ripe judgment might help his green opinions. He's done his duty at Nun's Cross, and I've no quarrel with him, though I can't say I like him as I did when he was a lad."

They arrived presently, to find Sarah already there. Damaris had also come, and Benjamin would get over later with James from Princetown.

"One can't give you anything you want nowadays," said Mary. "I'm sure I've cudgelled my brains and worried Marian behind the scenes for a month to know what I should give you for a birthday gift; but she won't help, and I can't think. I've knitted you two more pairs of they thick socks you like, and that's all I've done."

"And what better could you have done?" he asked.

His Aunt May presented Barry with a necktie. There was no cordiality on either side.

"I expect you'd sooner have had one of they boughten ties," she said. "But this is worked with my own hands, as you see. No call for you to wear it if you don't want to, of course."

"A very useful fashion of tie, and I'm very much obliged for it. The last ain't worn out yet, for that matter, though I've used it a lot. And thank you, I'm sure."

His Aunt Sarah had a much more sensational gift, which she introduced with a little sermon on the futility of earthly possessions.

"I haven't brought my present along with me, for the good reason I didn't know whether it would be a vitty thing to do," she said. "'Tis thought you be going to tell us what you've got in your mind's eye for next year, Barry; and then I shall know if you want my gift at Nun's Cross or somewhere else. In a word, it's the harmonium. Yes, I wish for you to have it in my lifetime, on the one condition that you'll let it pass to Rosy when he grows up."

"You mustn't part with it. Haven't you been like a mother to it?" asked Barry. "No, no, Aunt Sarah, keep your harmonium. We couldn't take it."

"You shall. The deed is done," she answered. "Looking back over my four years with thicky American organ, I can honestly say there was more pain than profit to them; so you and Marian will be doing me a favour to take it as I wish. 'Tis to be an heirloom, and did ought to go to the younger generation now. In that organ, you may say, I got heart to heart with money, Barry; yes, I did, and let it master me. I'm not ashamed to confess it now, though very like I ought to be ashamed at my age. 'Twas got for nought but the lust of possessing treasures, and no more real good nor comfort to me than a fly on the ceiling. In a word, I let an enemy in the house when I bought the contrivance, and I can't honestly say I've ever felt friendly to it from the first. Respect I did feel, because I knew it stood for money, and was valuable, and a lasting piece of furniture in itself; but friendly—no. I never neighboured with it properly for all the trouble and bees-wax I've given to it; and it have never neighboured with me. 'Twas a case of spending money in cold blood on myself, and it hasn't been a success. In fact, money don't succeed with me in any shape. I don't like it, and I'm more self-respecting without it."

"It's only because you couldn't play your organ that you feel that way against it, Sarah," explained Nathan. "The creature, so to call it, wants us humans to draw out its virtues and the powers hid in it. And since you can't do so, there's no bond put up between you, and the organ bides dumb. You can't get fond of it, because you don't know how to use it. If you think how you feel to your old knitting needles, you'll understand the difference."

"I never looked at it as a thing with secret powers of music in it, but more as property suitable to hand down in my will," explained Sarah. "And so you'd best teach Rosy to view it," she added to Barry, "because from the music point of view it ain't what it was. I've looked to the outside and kept it so as you could see your face in it, and every note properly shining, too, but the innards are, of course, beyond my understanding; and it seems the damp air of White Works, and the lack of use, and one thing and another, have left their mark inside the machine. Mrs. Pascoe ran her hands over it last Sunday at my wish, and she broke to me there was misfortunes happening inside by the sound. It makes a murmur like a coughing sheep; and, for my part, I never did much like the noise of it at its best. But there 'tis—a fine, upstanding piece of furniture so long as you leave it alone; and the question is, do you want it here or somewhere else?"

"I'll tell you after tea," answered Barry, "but think twice. It will leave a terrible gap in your house, and you'll miss it a thousand times a day."

"Not if I know 'tis with them that reverence it and love the giver," declared his aunt.

James and Benjamin Halfyard now appeared, and, after an elaborate meal, Barry announced his plans.

"I've thought a bit about it, and I was in this fix—I couldn't tell Marian, because if she had heard the choice of future courses in my mind, she'd have wanted me to choose to please myself. So she's been kept in the dark, too. It was a toss up for a time between going on farming, or giving up the land and trying a different sort of business altogether. But I've decided to be a farmer still."

"And what was the other line, Barry?" asked his mother. "Not an hour ago your uncle was saying that you'd got such big ideas, we couldn't see which way you were going nowadays."

Barry laughed.

"I daresay it looked like that; but there's no harm in having big ideas if you don't let 'em spoil your usefulness. My ideas never did anybody any harm, as I daresay Marian will bear out. At any rate, they've taken the shape of a tidy farm of a hundred and fifty acres in Drew-

steignton parish—out beyond Chagford way. 'Tis not quite the in-country and not quite the moor, a very nice place indeed, and a very good, big house for my wife and children, and a nice, small house for Little Jack and his family. 'Beacon Edge' 'tis called."

"You don't tell us what the other idea was, though your mother asked you," said Mrs. Mortimer.

"No, and I shan't, Aunt May. If I'd only had myself to think of I might have gone to a town and put money-making first; but as it happens, luckily for me, there's others to be considered. I'm going to stick to the job I've learned."

He turned to Marian, who looked supremely content.

"She was always for the delights of having her own farm; now she will," he said.

Sarah spoke first, and voiced her own emotions.

"Drewsteignton is a parlous way off for me."

"Not a bit of it. I'm hopeful you'll come and put in a month or more at a time. It's a big house and beautiful country round about, and everybody will be welcome who cares to come."

Then Halfyard spoke.

"Well, you surprise me," he said. "Not but what that was always your strong point, to be surprising people. But when I think of the way you've talked about money and your rare knowledge of all the tricks of it, I'm astonished that you're not going to do something with more promise and profit than farming again. I always thought you would start a shop."

But Barry shook his head.

"D'you see my wife in a shop? No, no. I've figured it out, and reckoned the open-air life is worth a bit of a sacrifice. I'm fond of farming and everything points to it, specially as I've found the very place I wanted for my purpose. They've picked the eyes out of it a bit of late years—the last people; but them as owned took that into consideration, of course. A year or two of my ways will soon put that right."

"And what might the rent be?" asked Nathan; but Barry did not choose to hear the question.

"It stands high, and is nice and clean for the most part; but a lot can easily be done for its betterment. There's

ten acres down by Teign river that will give me some wonderful potatoes, I expect—proper alluvial soil."

Again Nathan strove to win some information, and succeeded.

"A long lease, I hope, so your boy will see his life's work after you? Could you get ninety-nine years?"

This time the younger chose to be explicit.

"I've bought," he said.

"Bought Beacon Edge!" gasped Mr. Mortimer.

"Why not? I hope you'll come and see it soon and give me the benefit of your knowledge. It's a place that will please you a great deal. A farmer in earnest I shall be now. Living on the moor, one forgets the tremendous possibilities of a kinder climate."

Nathan slowly recovered from his surprise.

"Well," he said, "it's been your custom to do things, Barry, and not tell us how you do them. And you may be sure I shan't ask any questions, remembering very well how you turned me down last time I did so. I merely mention the fact that Beacon Edge can't have cost a penny less than eight to ten thousand pounds, and may have cost more."

His nephew turned to Marian.

"D'you mind a day, not so long ago, when I was anxious for postman and fretted because he came late?"

"Yes," she said, "very well. The world stood still for you till you got your letter."

"Well it might. That letter agreed to accept my offer for Beacon Edge."

"Give you joy of it, anyway," said James. "I hope it will be a tower of strength to you and yours, Barry."

"And so does your mother, God knows," declared Mary. "And don't think I hung back because I grudged the great thought, or wondered at your power to do such fine things; you don't surprise me, and never did. 'Tis only your Uncle Nathan and your Aunt May always seem to be so much upset when you show the fashion of brains in your head."

"You mustn't say that, please," retorted May sharply. "We ain't upset. I'm sure nothing that your son could do would upset us. We're only surprised."

"And why for should you be surprised?" asked Mary.

"For the very good reason that eight thousand pounds wasn't earned by Barry at Nun's Cross," replied her sister-in-law tartly.

"Keep your surprises to yourself, then. I ain't surprised; but I'm thinking. It means that you and the children go a long way off from me, Barry."

"I've been thinking, too," he answered, "and I'm not at all sure whether, when you and Aunt Sarah come over and see Drewsteignton and the advantages, that you may not be inclined to follow us."

"Leave White Works!" gasped Miss Mortimer.

"Why not, Aunt Sarah? After all, it's not the most convenient place in the world for people getting up in years. We must talk about it. Besides, no doubt Uncle Nathan's heard about the rumour of opening up the mines again. If that's done, I shouldn't think any of you would wish to stay, even if you could."

Nathan admitted this.

"I'd said nothing for fear of making trouble sooner than needful," he answered. "But now you've plumped it out in your rash way, we can confess it may happen. Some feel pretty sure the mines will be refloated next year with fresh capital. For my part, as they will mean a bit of compensation for me, I don't mind, and I should take the occasion very like to invest a bit myself, for I've always believed most steadfast there was a great future before White Works. But that's not here or there. As to us leaving, it lies in the future, and my wife will have her say about it when the time comes. We must each decide for ourselves."

Their tongues buzzed at this startling possibility, and Barry's news was almost forgotten before such personal intelligence. The thought of a disturbance in their little burrow agitated all of them. Sarah succumbed completely, and expressed dismay that the prophecy of an earthquake could hardly have increased. Mary announced her willingness to leave White Works at a month's notice. Nathan declared himself indifferent, but his wife felt much doubt. Perhaps of all the party James suffered most, for the prospect of leaving the immediate neighbourhood of Strane Steps filled him with acute concern. But he knew his mother's opinions,

for she had proclaimed an impatience with the place for some years, and it would certainly not be in the power of James to keep her there before the new excuses for departure. Moreover, he knew where she would go: she would follow Barry to Drewsteignton, since he and his children were now much the greatest interest in her life.

They all looked at the future from their own angle of vision, and Barry was amused when they were gone. Only he knew the further surprises that awaited them, but it was necessary that Marian should be the first to know more, and it remained to take his wife into his secrets at last. Thus the thing that she had desired for his sake for so many years; the mysteries which she knew existed, and which alone separated them; the tribulations and difficulties her husband was often under no pains to conceal; and the reasons for his strange alternations, his happiness and depression, his good and evil days—all were now laid before Marian—with no histrionics on Barry's part, but as though such an extraordinary series of incidents might be regarded as a matter of every day. His reasons for evasion and delay, his purpose for shutting her out of these things, he also told her. They were a compliment to Marian; but the confession involved her deeply and put upon her such questions as only the transparent probity of her own spirit was equal to answering.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE SHADOW OF UNCLE DAVID

After dinner, on the following day, Barry called Marian to his office, and she found that he had lighted a fire in the little grate.

"I want an hour of your time," he said, and she left him, gave a few necessary orders, and then returned.

"Now I can stop as long as you like," she declared.

"I expected you'd grumble a bit yesterday when they'd gone, but you didn't."

"I hadn't much to grumble at, I'm sure. You had reasons for not telling me when you bought the farm—or how you bought it. But I was too well pleased at the news to care a button about that. You know how I've hoped—yes, and prayed you to stop a farmer. As for your secrets, I've long given up asking for them now, and I never did ask for them except to be useful to you."

"That's all right. And now you're up against them. So I expect your bit of fun's over. I didn't tell you before about Beacon Edge, because you're like Uncle Nathan, and the first thing you'd have thought was the first thing he did—namely, where the deuce all the money came from. But I decided about telling you a fortnight ago; and now I don't know where confession's going to land me. You've often wondered why I kept my mouth shut so tight, even to you; and you never knew it was your own fault, Marian. I didn't refuse you because you asked, as you've always thought; I very well knew that you only asked because you wanted to help the show and wished me to be happy and content, and hoped to make me so; and if you'd been another sort of woman and begged as you did, so like as not I should have given it all away years ago. But I didn't trust you: you've shown me too much of yourself. You were too awful straight, too deadly clear in your own mind about what is right and what

is wrong, and what is honest and what is doubtful. You can be trusted to make no shadow of a mistake on any question that involves plain dealing. It amounts to a disease carried so far as you carry it. I saw all that, and I admired it a lot, but, things being as they were, I didn't find it any too helpful. I'll own this, though. It had the effect of making me disquiet very often. It fretted me, and it was all I could do to stand up against it sometimes. I couldn't help contrasting my own difficulties with your unchanging way, and my problems of conscience with your safe and sure outlook, which, of course, would have reckoned them no problems at all. In fact, though you thought you weren't doing anything, you were influencing me all the time, and many a day, when you threw unconscious light on my affairs, I cussed you for doing it. Why? Because you spoiled my fun again and again. You never meant to; but so it fell out, because you were yourself, and you can take everything to your credit. For if it hadn't been for you, Marian, and your view of things, I should never have got out of conceit with my view of things. But for you, deals I've done wouldn't have disturbed me at all; but they couldn't fail to disturb me while I watched your way. It's took all my determination and pluck to be tricky, I promise you! But now I'm going to throw up the sponge, and it was the contrast between your way and mine that finally worked me up to what I'm going to do.

"I've watched and weighed the chances, and I've come to the conclusion that, on the whole, you get more out of life than I do—more of the best of it. But even that's not all, for if we'd had no children I might still have kept my mouth shut till the end of time and died a mighty rich man. But there they are—Rosy and Mary Ann, and more to come—and I see your way is good for them too—better than mine; so that's another reason for owning up. Granted I've kept you out of what I was doing since the start; but only because I knew, if you came in, you wouldn't be content to let things go on as you found them. So to let you in would have been to ruin your happiness, if I wasn't prepared to change.

"I wasn't then; I am now. I'm fed up with it, and I don't care so very much what happens. I'm straighter

than I thought, seemingly, and even if I could bear the strain of being a bit off the straight, I couldn't bear the idea of Rosy being. So he's got to be thanked too. Of course, you may not think it as bad as I'm suggesting, and I hope you'll be merciful about it, Marian."

Thus he introduced the subject, and her heart warmed to him.

"It's properly blessed to hear you talk like this," she said, "and I'm very proud to be your wife, Barry, and the mother of your son. For I believe this is more his work than mine, though he'll never know it, I expect. And as to being merciful—who am I but your wife, who loves the shadow you throw on the grass?"

But Barry was looking ahead. The natural man could not perish.

"Not mercy for the past," he said. "I take that for granted. You'll forgive my games when you hear about 'em; and if you don't, I can't help it; but you've got to be merciful in the future. In a word, you mustn't be too hard on me."

"Not likely."

"It is likely. That's why I don't feel quite so content as I might. I'm glad the murder's out, or going to be out; but I'm a bit anxious for the result. There must be a—well, a compromise here and there, Marian. All life's built on compromise."

Her face fell a little.

"You can't compromise on some things. You're like everybody, Barry. You want to have your cake and eat it too."

"That's just a thing you would say, of course; and you're above any sympathy for man or woman who seeks such an impossible thing. But make no mistake; I've neither had my cake nor eaten it. I've done an amazing deal of very hard work and allowed myself no more than very modest returns for doing it. I've worked for others, you may say—my family, in fact. Now it all centres on —however, you'll see for yourself when you've heard the story."

He entered upon a statement of facts, unusual enough, but not extraordinary when considered in the light of the man responsible for them. Indeed, Barry pointed this out.

"You remember, after Uncle David's will was read, Uncle Nathan told us that curious things must always happen when you're dealing with curious men. That's true enough; and far more curious things were hidden by Uncle David than any he chose to reveal—hidden for me, and me only. I was faced with pretty strange problems by his will, and still more in the letter he left for me. And you're not going to approve of my solution to these problems, no doubt, or say I tackled the puzzle right."

"The first thing is to hear what your puzzle was, Barry. All I know is that, however you solved it, it didn't make you happy."

"Granted, but it did much more. There's far bigger things than happiness. His letter interested me something tremendous and taught me countless things well worth knowing, and filled my life with experiences. I can never be the same now, and don't want to be. I can go back on it and do what you advise, and I hope it will be possible; and I grant I've been a stranger to peace of mind for years. I may find peace of mind worth the price, or I may not; but I'm out for it now. I'm out to see eye to eye with you as far as possible, and trust you'll make fair allowances."

"That was the only cloud on my life, Barry, that I never made you as perfectly happy as I thought and hoped to."

"You couldn't while I had this business on hand and hid it. Now perhaps you will, if you're clever enough. In a word, when Uncle David died he left sixteen thousand pounds more than appeared in his will. He'd locked up that money, just for stupid hatred of authority—cut off his nose to spite his face, you may say—and was content to let it rot in the earth instead of making it earn for him. His intention was to escape taxes while he lived and death duties when he died. That was the sole reason, so his letter said to me. He'd turned the money into Bank of England notes and hid it, in parcels of fifteen hundred or two thousand, round about in the West Quarter of the Moor. It had been his pleasure and amusement to do that, and in his letter to me there was a wonderful plan of where he'd planted his parcels—showing to a hair where each was hidden. I found the last wad in a secret drawer

in his desk. He was going to take it out and hide it after Christmas, no doubt, but didn't live to do so."

"Sixteen thousand pounds, Barry!"

"He got old tobacco tins, packed in the money, wrapped it up with oiled rag, and then he plastered the tins over with sealing wax, wrapped 'em a second time in old strips of tarpaulin, and buried 'em in little graves filled with sand and generally dug deep under a natural stone. He always chose such stones as no moor-man would ever want, and he hid his money well off the beaten tracks, but so careful was his plan of the hiding-places that only once was I beat in finding one, and then the fault was mine, not his, and I got it at the second search."

"You got it all?"

"Every penny, and invested it, of course. Like a fool, I bought cattle at first and started my own man here, you remember. But then Uncle Nathan smelt a rat. He thought I'd been borrowing and warned me against it. So, after that, I was sharper and very careful to invest out of sight. And I may say I've been absolutely straight in that matter. But to your sort of honesty, I know, my plan won't hold water, because, first, there's death duties and calls when the old man died, and, second, there's my family, who owned the money by right. The only way to look at it reasonably is to say I've been handling the money for the family, and I'm quite prepared to give an account of my stewardship."

She was thinking for a moment of David Mortimer.

"What a mixture must that man have been," she said.

"Yes, he was. But I'd never have believed he could actually lose money for hate of lawful authority. I understood him better than anybody; but I don't understand that in him. I've worked it out very careful. He must have lost hundreds—nay, thousands, for he'd had some of his savings hid away for years; and if he'd put it out to interest he'd have died thousands richer than he did."

"And what did you do with it, Barry?"

"I invested so fast as ever I collected it. My days with rod or gun generally meant a money hunt. Often I came home two thousand pounds richer than I went out. The capital now, after more than four years, is swelled up to

well over twenty thousand. You'd say it couldn't, but, you see, I took a certain line and went into things that offered a lot of interest against the element of danger. I felt, if I lost all, none would be the wiser, and if I had luck, then I'd make all the stronger case when the time came to own up. It was anxious, exciting work. You can't guess what a thrilling job it is handling money. And it came off nearly every time. The luck was with me. And now I'm coming to the interesting thing. I've bought Beacon Edge with a part of the money and, assuming you think this story must be known, then——"

"Who knows better than you that it must be known, Barry?"

"There's a lot to be said against too. What's money to them? Look at the absurdity of it. It will only worry them all to death."

She did not even hear this argument.

"You'll have to begin at the beginning, I suppose, and figure out what has got to be given up to the Government."

"Was afraid you'd point that out. Never mind; let sleeping dogs lie. The death duties and that must be paid first, I grant."

"And you can't fairly say you had your family in mind, Barry, else you wouldn't have speculated and taken a lot of risk."

"Of course. You've figured that out too."

But Marian appeared amazingly cheerful, and Barry reproved her.

"I warn you again not to overdo this," he said. "It's all very fine getting a free mind and having this off one's chest; but we've got to live; and I haven't done all I've done for nearly five years now only to be just where I was at the start, Marian. We've lived on my salary. I've only used a few hundreds of this money now and again. There's nothing large saved of what you'd call my very own money; but I've turned this sixteen thousand into over twenty thousand, and done mighty well by it, and bought Beacon Edge at a very good bargain. And I'm not going to work it like I've worked this place. The position must be very different from that. You're too fair not to see it."

"I think you can trust your relations, Barry."

"I want to draw their teeth first, however. I've got my own ideas on that matter. I want to use my knowledge of their characters—that's fair—eh?"

"First, be quite clear about the past. I suppose you owe more than the death duties—there would be interest running too?"

He nodded.

"I see you're going to have your pound of flesh out of me, Marian. I wish you wasn't so clever at figures yourself. You shall have your fill of 'em anyway, now. Often and often I've longed to let you into the secret and hand over my books to you—such a masterpiece you'd have made of 'em. And if I have any books left to keep after the reckoning, then you shall keep 'em. I've got so clever with cash that sometimes I pictured myself just living to make this money breed in the future. But I knew you wouldn't be happy away from the country—and you wouldn't have liked to see Rosy brought up to nought but money-making."

"No more would you; no more would you. This is Rosy's work, I tell you."

"'Tis your work," he said. "If anything was ever certain, it is that I should have hung on to this cash unless I'd married you. No other woman would have had power to choke me off it. 'Twas all I could do to hide it from you; but—well, the past is dead now."

"The past never dies if you ain't straight," she said.

"I'm going to be straight and kill it with straightness. I'm going to be what you call straight, and I'm also going to be what I call sane. Life is only a deal between straightness and sanity. That's business. That's the way the world runs. You must keep in your mind what this means to me, Marian."

"I do, Barry. And, knowing you so well, I know you don't mean any half measures about it. You'll go straight as a bee. You must. It's no case for tinkering, or playing about with what you call compromises. You're fortunate, in a way, for you come out without any punishment at all that I can see—unless."

"I'm punished all right. Don't you fancy I shan't be. The best that can hap isn't a patch on what might have

happened. Any fool can see that. I ought to be rewarded, not punished, in my own opinion. And the reward's your happinesss and my peace of mind. I never bothered about peace of mind; but as you get older it looks more worth while. All that matters is my investments went right. In fact, I'm a dab at that sort of caper. And now there's Government, Uncle Nathan, Aunt Sarah and mother. I've got to answer to them."

"What shall you say to Government?" she asked.

"Nought," he replied. "Less truck with the law the better. Conscience money it's called. I send it unknown to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and it's acknowledged in the papers. There's the capital that belonged to Government at Uncle David's death, and interest on it for just short of five years. It's strange and queer, but, of course, what is fantastical from the everyday point of view ain't fantastical when you think of Uncle David. It's all in his character, and the poor old devil would break his heart if he knew I was going to scatter his stuff. And I'm sorry for him even now, because I know, if he'd only trusted me and left me the lot, and hadn't been so cracked against women, he'd never have had any call to regret it."

"And what such a man as him had no call to regret, everybody else would have regretted," she said. "The grand thing is he wasn't strong enough to make you a slave to money, through and through. He'd have done it if he'd lived another year, I believe, for he was growing on you fast—growing on you like I've seen love of drink grow on a poor young chap sometimes. He'd started you well on the road, Barry, but, thank God, you never was easy upon it. You'd have left it sooner or later—I'm positive you would. For a time must have come when you turned against money and hated it, after you'd got to see from experience the true littleness of it."

"It's little, or big, as the owner's little or big. I'd never have made it do anything peddling or mean. I'd have—however, it's not what I'd have done, but what Uncle Nathan and the others will do. And in that matter I've got my ideas—nothing to hurt any of 'em—still, something to be useful to us. For how do it stand? You know that this money to Uncle Nathan will probably

mean giving up work. He'll most likely leave White Works and go off; and if he does nothing, he'll grow old double fast. He'll also use his money to have more power to dictate to his beastly wife, and we know where that'll land 'em. So that's the fate of his portion—to breed trouble. You see that, Marian? For my conscience, so that I may be at peace with you and everybody, I put this burden on Uncle Nathan. Then there's Aunt Sarah—I'm sorrier for her than any of 'em. I shouldn't wonder if it killed her to hear she'd got to face another six or seven thousand pounds. In fact, I'm so terrible put about for her that I'm going to see her myself and break it to her as gently as possible, and help her to face it."

Marian looked suspicious.

"You're up to something, Barry?"

"Who's so selfish as a Christian?" he asked. "So long as I save my own soul and go straight, as you call it, you don't care what trials and troubles I throw on other unfortunate people."

"You're turning things upside down," she answered. "I can't cope with you; but for you to do dead right is all we need think about. Wrong never came out of right."

"I'm none so sure of that. Last, there's mother," he concluded. "It won't be no pleasure whatever to her to hear about this. Money won't help to solve her problems. If she goes from here and comes after us, as she will do if she has her way, then what becomes of James? It will be a fearful blow for him to leave Anstice and go and live in Princetown; and he can't bide at White Works alone."

"These questions will answer themselves, be sure."

"Yes, but it's up to me to help with the answers. I'm letting the money go, because that's right and proper; but I don't want to see it put to bad uses, nor yet wasted."

They discussed details for another hour, and then the early dusk came down.

"'Tis candle-teening a'most," said Marian, "and what a wonderful day! Shall I wake up and find it's a dream, Barry? But I know I shan't. Come and have some tea. My throat's dried up talking. But I'd sooner sing than talk—indeed I would."

He could not fail to note her elation.

"This is as good as a fortune to you," he said.

"No fortune could bring me what you have to-day," she answered. "'Tis not the money, or all the particulars and mysteries. That's nothing. But what's everything is that you've made me see I was helping you all the time I thought I was only hindering. My God! I'll never despair of helping nobody again, for I know now how you may be helping just when it looks most like as if you couldn't. It's the happiest day since our Rosy was born."

"Poor little chap! I hope he'll never live to cuss you for taking away all them thousands when he hears about it."

"I've took away nothing, and gived him a happy father instead of a troubled one. Who can tell what you've saved him? And don't you come to me for too much sympathy neither, Barry. I ought to be leeturing you instead of loving you, I reckon. To think of them five years spent in this dark way breeding money. And if it had failed instead of succeeded! If you'd lost it, you'd have gone to your grave a haunted man."

"'Tis Uncle David would have haunted me, then."

"No, no. You'd never have feared his ghost—else you wouldn't do what you're going to do. It's your own conscience that would have haunted you. And it's your own conscience that has been haunting you."

"I ain't feared of that either; but I'm sick of it," he admitted. "I'm glad to have things different—for your sake, Marian."

CHAPTER XXXVI

A SHOCK FOR SARAH

Broken land, in dips and hollows, where green turf now rolled over the old workshops and conduits of the mines, spread along the hillside between Strane Steps and the Black Houses, the homes of Sarah and Mary. There, among the ruins and stumps of vanished buildings and in snug dimples of the waste, James would often bring Anstice and make games for her. They sat in this spot on a November afternoon, and the child, clad in a little, red worsted jacket and indigo-blue pinafore, kept shop, while James made purchases. Her goods were fragments of quartz and splinters of broken cloam from a crockery heap down below, where pottery, old tins and worn-out kitchen utensils accumulated year by year.

Here the pair played, while the day grew gradually darker, a north wind blew, and from time to time a flake of snow sidled to earth. All things were cold and dry and ready for the snow. The lichens woven through the herbage had gown crisp, the grass was sere, and the ling had taken on its winter gloom.

The thoughts of James were darkly coloured too, for he regarded the future with very great anxiety since the announcement of Barry's departure at the following spring. That most certainly meant a change for him also, because his mother would not let the whole breadth of Dartmoor separate her from Barry and his children. She had, indeed, long desired to be nearer to them than was the case, and though that continued impossible while the family dwelt at Nun's Cross, at Drewsteignton there were small houses within reach of Beacon Edge, and Mary had already decided to occupy one of them. She was to drive over with Barry and Marian before Christmas, and James had never seen his mother so cheerful or interested in her affairs. She viewed departure from her present home with indifference and revealed no

sentiment whatever on the subject. Her sole concern was that she must be considerably farther from Damaris; but Damaris had no children, and James noticed, as a circumstance beyond his experience, that his mother now appeared to feel a livelier interest in the rising generation than her own sons and daughter. He puzzled to explain this, but suspected it might be because the little ones glorified their grandmother and she felt more a personage in their eyes than in their parents'.

His mother recognised the dilemma of James, but saw no plan at present to solve the problem. Nor did he. His own affairs were a little doubtful at this season, for the future of the stores still remained uncertain. Mr. Edwards, whose health failed, began to consider the desirability of turning his enterprise into a company; but his daughter felt strongly averse from the step, nor, indeed, was her father inclined to take it. The issue might not matter to James, but he shared the present uncertainty. To live at Princetown and only see Anstice at intervals would try him much, but unless his Aunt Sarah found herself able to give him a home, no alternative offered, save one. He might keep on his mother's house and live alone there. The prospect was within his means, and he guessed that would probably happen. He regarded the possibility with indifference, for loneliness, broken by Anstice, offered its own attraction to one who cared not for other companionship.

Now the child brought him sharply from his personal reveries and back to their games. It was Saturday, and presently James and his charge were going to tea with Sarah, whose dwelling stood beneath, a hundred yards from their playground.

That part of the afternoon's entertainment was not, however, destined to mature, for even as the man and child played together, another man sprang like a spot on the high hills to the west and a tall, brisk figure descended from Nun's Cross. It was Barry Worth, who prepared to advance his interests and take an important step upon which great matters were destined to depend.

As he strode along, with the north wind in his face and the flakes of snow still falling at intervals, he had leisure to marshal his thoughts and consider the events of the

immediate past. Three weeks had intervened since his conversation and confession, and during that time much had been done. The estate was cleared of legal obligations; the conscience money had been despatched and publicly acknowledged. Careful estimates and calculations, in which Marian mightily assisted him, were made. Nothing remained but to lay the facts before his family, and Barry had explained to his wife exactly the methods he proposed to pursue in this matter. She was willing and prepared to support him, yet knew his intentions might provoke opposition in one quarter. He admitted it, but expected no particular difficulty. His proposals were reasonable and based on knowledge of character. He felt, indeed, little doubt of the result.

For himself, he was cheerful and constrained in turn. The immense change in his life he began to recognise, and gradual effacement of its chief excitement and attraction could not fail to leave him moody and regretful at times. He chafed a little and indulged in some impatience when he reflected on the result of his activities and secret enterprise. It was natural, for he had developed gifts proper to his character and acquired considerable knowledge of all that goes to the handling and making of money. Success had increased his ardour and widened his knowledge. He possessed the instinct of finance, and the years of study and experience left him very accomplished at that science, with a sound knowledge of certain markets and a lucid comprehension of the methods of the Stock Exchange. The mere miser in his dead uncle had perhaps wakened latent faculties in him; but he had proceeded on a higher plane, with larger understanding and a truer grasp of the business of money-making. He had, indeed, taken risks at the outset of his enterprise which David would never have taken; but an element of good fortune had not made him reckless and, indeed, the risks themselves he might never have taken but for the peculiar conditions attaching to the situation. And upon his rather devious moral estimates and values his wife had always acted like a drag, for there was that in his native character to appreciate her too. Indeed, with time, her steady and unchanging outlook had brought him finally to his present course of action.

He was glad enough that it should be so, but could not help regretting his talent, and the knowledge that henceforth it must be of small value. There were great compensations, yet he often felt in two minds still, and was not so thankful for his escape as Marian declared herself to be. He knew that he had renounced power, influence, perhaps a considerable position in days to come; and he felt, among minor emotions, a little disappointment that his wife had not recognised this as fully as he deserved that she should. Her joy was good to him, but it seemed that she was mentally incapable of appreciating the extent of his sacrifice. Indeed, all she thought on the subject appeared to be that Barry had come out of it much better than strict justice would have brought him. She did not realise that his punishment, so to call it, centred in a very living and active operation of the mind, and that he was enduring it, in his own opinion, with considerable patience and fortitude. As against this, however, Marian had accepted and approved his arrangements, albeit they entailed upon her responsibilities and modifications of her future home for which she had not bargained. But the whole question of Beacon Edge depended upon these plans, and she was quick to meet him here. Indeed, she applauded the inspiration, though ignorant of its full extent and scope. Doubts remained, for success depended upon a third person of small mind and uncertain opinions.

To her Barry now addressed himself with all the diplomacy at his command, for it was to his Aunt Sarah, not his Uncle Nathan, that the truth had first to be imparted. With Nathan Mortimer he would speak later, for the future of the large sums involved greatly interested Barry.

He arrived at his aunt's home alert and cheerful, because he was now occupied in the task of playing for his own hand—an operation congenial enough to most of us. Moreover, complete success would mean another of his dearly-loved surprises for Marian herself. His plan struck deeper than he had let her imagine.

Elsewhere a little incident seemed further to darken the thought of James, for suddenly a trap stole down the grey road that fell into White Works and he saw the doctor

drive over the leat, enter the hamlet, and disappear behind the barn at Strane Steps. The accident put him in mind of agonies nearly five years old; nor did the actual event serve by a shadow to lessen those poignant recollections. Mrs. Pascoe was about to bear another child, but James felt no interest whatever in that occurrence. He was fond of Sophia, and knew that no need for anxiety on her account existed. In regarding the trap he had missed Barry, who was now at his aunt's door, but half an hour later, when James and Anstice descended to tea, the brothers met.

Sarah herself appeared when her nephew knocked. She expressed pleasure, modified by a slight grievance.

"At last, then! So you've took three weeks to decide about the harmonium, and I feel rather surprised at it, Barry."

He kissed her.

"No, no—that was too serious a thing to put by. We'd decided long ago, and I can tell you, Aunt Sarah. It will be properly respected in my home and regarded as a trust for Rosy. And if you approve of it, when we move I'll have the works put in order. Very like, when Mary Ann grows a little older, she might learn to play it if you approved."

The old woman brightened.

"That's right, then. And how be Rosy? Don't you let him run out without his wool coat I gave him now it's got to winter."

"Be sure we shan't—a proper godsend that coat, and he's so proud of himself as a magpie when he puts it on."

They talked a little, his purpose being to get her in an amiable frame of mind. Then he came to the great matter.

"I'm not here only about the organ, I must tell you. There's a most important business I've got to put before you, Aunt Sarah—so important and properly exciting, in a way, that I felt it was better you should hear it from me than anybody."

She clouded.

"I hate business," she said. "If it's about my money——"

"I know you hate business, and that's why I want

to save you all the trouble I can. You're a lot to me and Marian, and when I told her about this affair, her first thought and fear was you. 'She must not be worried,' Marian said, and I told her you wasn't going to be worried if I could help it."

"Get it over, then, and talk of pleasanter things," answered Miss Mortimer. "James and Anstice be coming to tea presently. He's got her for twenty-four hours because Sophia Pascoe's brought to bed, and Mary have taken the child for the night, so as to free their hands."

"I'll stop too, with pleasure. It's like this, Aunt Sarah: after Uncle David died, and I was married, I found myself faced with a very curious state of things, and it was a great tax on a young man to know exactly what to do. I took my way, and I may have done wrong, or I may have done right, but at any rate the outcome is this. Uncle David left a good deal more than he set down in his will, because he didn't choose the size of his savings should be known by anybody but me. I needn't worry you with any details unless you want 'em, but——"

"Oh, my God! You don't mean more money! I won't face it—hear me, Barry—I won't face it! I deny it—I won't go through what I was called to go through when David died—not for anybody."

"That's just what I felt, and that's why I come to you first, because you are a lot more to Marian and me than Uncle Nathan is, and I feel it's my duty to save you everything in my power. But I can't do impossibilities: I've got to leave certain things to your judgment, though I've taken every possible step to make it as easy for you as you'd wish."

"Take it," she said. "Take it, whatever it is, for the Lord's sake and spare me. I'm asked to do too much nowadays. I can't stand it—Mary going, and everything. My brain will break down, Barry. I'm in a proper miz-maze a'ready before I've heard a word."

"Be quite calm," he said. "'Tis all perfectly simple and straightforward, and I don't leave this house till you're satisfied and content and happy again. In a word, I handled the money to the best of my skill and power, and did exceeding well by it. But now I must give an account of my stewardship, and how we stand—all fair

and honest and above-board. I've got in cash a matter of sixteen thousand pounds, or thereabout, and I've got in property Beacon Edge Farm at Drewsteignton. Nought's mine, Aunt Sarah. All's yours and mother's and Uncle Nathan's. You may take it, dividing in three equal parts, so that there's from seven to eight thousand for two of you and the farm for the third. It's not for me to say how the division shall be made, but I put this to you, Aunt Sarah. Mind, Marian and me are quite at one on the subject, and if you see your way she'll be as proud as me. You're listening? Don't look so sad about it. There's nothing to distress you."

"Barry," she said, "once for all, I deny it—I renounce it—money or land. I'm not going to be burdened, and I won't be forced. 'Tis just all I can do to manage my money as it is, and I know I'm robbed, and the more you have the more you're swindled behind your back. 'Tis maddening stuff, and all I ask of you is to take it away and keep it. I can't stand no more—not a penny."

"Very well, then. So we thought you might feel; and knowing your high scorn of the stuff, we've made up a plan. Suppose now, Aunt Sarah, you agree to take the farm for your share—wait—hear me—and suppose you say this: 'I'm getting old, and I want to be nearer my own. And my sister is going to Drewsteignton, and my nephew and his family are also going there. Then, seeing as I've got a farm there, which my nephew is going to run for me, why for shouldn't I leave this place and go with the rest and take up my home with my nephew and his wife?' Now I put it to you, Aunt Sarah, that nothing could fall out better. Marian would dearly like to have you, and you'd have your own rooms—so many as you pleased—'tis a great big sun-facing place. And you'd be free to live your own life, or share ours, just so much or little as suited you. Then you'd have my mother near by, and we should have your good influence on the childer, and you'd be free as air about money and everything."

"To live along with you and Marian?" she asked tremulously. "She never would care about that?"

"And why not? A tower of strength you'd be to all of us. We're all going, you see—at least, it lies pretty much in your hands. For money's power, and you can't escape

the power, hate the money as you may. The farm would be yours, and I venture to think you'd leave it to me someday, and, meantime, I'd dearly love to work it for you and only you."

Miss Mortimer was much agitated.

"On your oath, Barry, would you and Marian like me to live along with you?"

"How can you doubt it? Have we ever had a word? Wasn't my first thought, when my child came, to have you for gossip? We've always been close friends, and I owe you a very great deal—so does Marian. I have put a lot of thinking into this, and it was a long time before I could see how to save you the trouble of thousands more money. But this does it. You're free of every anxiety and can trust me to do the right thing. In fact, the only care I have in the matter is for the future. In the course of nature you must go first, though you'll live twenty years longer at Drewsteignton than in this forgotten place. But I venture humbly to suggest that you might think of us afterwards."

"If it happened," said Sarah, "I mustn't have nothing like that on my mind. Already my will have been troubling me for two years. And now it's made and signed and sealed and done for. If this happened—though it's such a hugeous upheaval I can't picture it—if this happened, Barry, I won't have no truck whatever with the farm. In fact, I'll go so far as to make that a condition. Suppose this is all true, and you and Marian would like for me to join you, then I come just as I am—not to no farm of my own. I come to your farm. I come because you want for me to come, or not at all."

He purposely misunderstood her.

"I see. Well, we want you to come all right, and you'll hear Marian on that subject. But you mean that so far as the farm goes you'd rather not have it? I'm afraid if you refuse the farm, Aunt Sarah, you'll have to take up seven or eight thousand pounds of money, or stocks or shares that stand for it."

"I don't mean that—don't go back on it—don't say awful things like that, for God's sake! I mean the farm's yours—now—this instant minute. Yes, I tell you. It's quite enough excitement for me, and more than enough,

to have all these wild changes rattling about my ears."

"Of course it is. I'm really sorry for you, Aunt Sarah. I'd have kept this from you if I could; but it had to be. You must think it over. You mightn't like to come to us. You might prefer your own house near by; you may not choose to leave White Works. But, whatever you do, I hope you'll feel nothing would rejoice Marian and me better than that you come to us. You'll want to think about it. She'll be bitterly disappointed if you don't see your way to join us. She's building on it. But you must drive over and look round and see if the place and the house suits you. But don't worry—there's nothing to worry about, anyway. Your word will be law. You understand, I've told you about it first—to save you all I could. Before my own mother I came to you, and all you've got to decide for the minute is if you'll live with me and Marian."

"'Tis a great deal too good to be true, Barry."

"That's how I feel when you talk about taking up your share in the shape of the farm and handing it over to me."

"That's done," she said. "You must agree to that, or I shan't close my eyes to-night."

"Would you like to come to us? Be honest, Aunt Sarah."

"Yes, I would then—I'd love to come to you—if it's fair to Marian. A proper promised land for an old woman like me, I'm sure."

"A very great gain for Marian too. But turn it over—turn it over—just calmly and cheerfully. Look at it every way without worrying. I'd sooner be in your debt than anybody's alive, and a mountain of debt it will be. But you must rest assured I'd do my best to return good for your good. Only I shouldn't have much chance to pleasure you unless you lived with us, so I beg you'll try and see your way to do it. I don't think I could take the farm, Aunt Sarah, if you didn't come to live in it. In fact, I doubt if Marian would let me."

"When would it happen?"

"Next spring—you'd suit yourself as to that."

Voices sounded at the door. It opened, and James and

Anstice arrived for tea. But Aunt Sarah was in no case to entertain anybody now. Her nerves had received a jar too tremendous.

"You must go to your mother, James," she said. "I'm sorry, but Barry has brought me some very shattering news this afternoon and I'm properly on edge. I can't do nothing. You'd best to get me a drop of brandy and then leave me."

James, expressing concern, departed with Anstice, whom he left at home. He returned in two minutes with some spirit in a wine-glass. Sarah added water and drank it off. Then she declared herself better.

"I'll look in again afore I go up the hill," said Barry, after which he left her and went to his mother with James. He was content, and felt that the future would now happen as he had planned. He had expected Sarah's attitude. It only remained to keep her in that mind until the deed of gift should be executed. For the others he was not concerned. His mother would think as he thought, and his uncle would certainly prefer money to the encumbrance of property.

James was interested to learn what had happened of a nature to upset Sarah so completely, and Barry explained.

"You'll hear how it is pretty soon, I reckon. It looks as if I was going to empty this rabbit warren afore long, Jimmy."

"Mother's set on coming after you."

"And why not, if she wants to? Surely to God we've all lived on this desert long enough."

"Any other place would be a desert to me—not this."

"Well, you'll have it to yourself before long."

"It wouldn't be to myself," explained James, "because of memories. To a man like me, the real things in my life belong to the past—all but little Anstice. I daresay that sounds foolishness to you, but so it is."

"Life's life," answered Barry, "and if you're going to put dreams first, then you'll go on being not much better than a dream yourself and never know the meaning of reality."

"If a man's dreams are all he's got, 'tis no good quarrelling with them. But I have more than dreams. The child's no dream. And I'm a lot put about when

I think of going farther off. In fact, I don't see my duty away from her. She was a promise to the dead, Barry."

His brother felt not much concerned for Jimmy's troubles at this moment. To him they appeared no more than moonshine. He had, however, sometimes speculated as to the little girl. They went to their mother, informed her that Sarah had recovered, and helped her to get tea ready. Then Barry told his news once more and amazed them.

"I'm sick of going over it," he said, "and you can have all the details presently. Uncle Nathan will get 'em next. But I've got to look ahead for myself and, as it ain't very likely I shall be thought of by him, I've thought of myself and gone to the quarter where I could do myself most good. No doubt I've been a bit cleverer than Uncle Nathan will understand, but, when all's said, nobody's got no call to yelp about it."

He explained, as he had explained to his aunt, and added a description of the interview with Miss Mortimer.

"It all went all right, and I can't see why Uncle Nathan should raise any objection to her having the farm for her portion and handing it over to me and coming to live with me. It's a very reasonable sort of a plan. Nobody's influenced her. And you'll have money, mother, and so will he."

"I shan't want the money," began Mary; but her son stopped her.

"Don't you begin that damned nonsense, please. It was all right with Aunt Sarah, but you do want it, and you've got to think of Damaris and James and your grandchildren. I'll help you to manage the money. In fact, I'm a good bit interested to see the future of it. Yours will be all right, and you can come to Drewsteignton in style now and have a nice house and every comfort. As for Uncle Nathan's thousands, Lord knows what he'll do; but that's up to you, James. I reckon Anstice ought to be thought upon. She's the only rightful heir to Uncle Nathan's money."

"She'll have mine, anyhow," said James. "That is, if mother wills any of hers to me. But I'd sooner she left it straight to her. I don't want money."

Barry was impatient.

"To hear all you people! It makes me laugh—the wrong side of my mouth. Nobody wants it—nobody's got no use for thousands! All frightened of it, as if it brought the plague. And me—the only one who understands the stuff and how to manage it and make it bend to me—I've got to hand it over!"

"It's where it came from, Barry," explained his mother. "'Tisn't like common money, your Uncle David's. Us never can lose sight of him gathering it together—how, his Maker only knows. I never shall feel, as long as I live, that it's proper money, and I never shall feel he wanted any of us to have it—but you. In fact, we know he did not."

"He queered my pitch all right, and he was a fool for his pains, because the one person that knew what he'd done and understood how to go on and better his beginnings was me. However, things are as they are and, if anything could amuse me, it would be to see you all twittering over it."

"I'm sure you must be glad to clear this up," declared James. "And the longer you live, the better you'll feel that you have, Barry. It wouldn't have done you lasting good."

"Anyway, that's how we stand."

The shout of a gathering gale broke a momentary silence that followed.

"I must be gone," continued the master of Nun's Cross. "The wind's howling in the chimney like a pig being killed. We're going to have heavy snow to-night. I'll look in on Aunt Sarah half a minute and fix her promise. Have a tell with her, mother, and keep her up to it. We must get her to Beacon Edge, and it will make for her happiness a lot. She's got nothing to live for now but you and my children."

"What does Marian say?"

"She's very well content indeed, and hopes it will happen. I've got a little surprise for her too. She thought Aunt Sarah was coming to live at her own farm—not mine. Marian reckons I'm getting a deal too well out of this, and she'll think so more than ever now. Little she knows, or anybody knows, how I'm getting out of it.

Only your heart knows its own bitterness. But that'll pass. She's quite right—she's always right. If I get Beacon Edge at this price, I'm well enough out of it, no doubt."

They talked a little longer, then Barry prepared to get off.

"Not a word to Uncle Nathan, mind. He's got to hear this from me, and he'll be none too pleased to hear it last. I'm not afeared of him, but his wife will try to be nasty, and she don't often try without succeeding."

"She won't quarrel with it," prophesied Mary. "It means the end of White Works for them too, I expect."

"Yes; he'll be a gentleman now and have nothing to do. I dare say he'll put money into the mines, if they open 'em again, and very likely end a pauper. Just a silly thing he would do. He won't ax me to help him swell his banking account, anyway; and he won't thank me that I have."

He set out into the snow, for it was falling heavily and the night had closed in dark and rough.

"Can you get home all right?" asked his mother, and he laughed and went his way. He looked in upon his aunt, heard her decision, expressed his hearty gratitude, hinted at the joy of Marian and Rosy when they heard the good news, and so plunged off again into the shouting storm.

At his mother's house came the business of putting Anstice to bed.

"The dinky maid's half asleep as it is," said James.

"I'll unray her and get her in the cot I've made up in my room," declared Mary, "then you can wish her 'good night.'"

"I'd promised to tell her a tale," he said, "but she won't want it to-night."

"Did you hear how it was with Sophia?"

"No—we didn't go back."

"Charles will feel that, I'm afraid."

Later, when Anstice slumbered, they considered the great news.

"It's my certain duty to stop here," he said, "so as

I can always have my eye upon her. I promised her mother."

"I couldn't be happy at Drewsteignton if you was here. 'Twould be too lonely, far."

"It's the only place that never will be lonely for me," he answered.

CHAPTER XXXVII

CONFESSION

Mr. Mortimer, in his metaphysical way, sometimes wondered whether Charles Pascoe was still his son-in-law, or whether the death of his daughter had annulled the relationship. It was such a vain problem as often occupied his meditations.

Now, looking out upon a world of snow, he perceived Charles at the outer gate of Strane Steps vigorously wielding a broom, and he left his own door and approached him.

"I didn't come over last night, because the weather was so coarse," he said, "But I had you in my mind, and make no doubt all went well and your cares are ended. Was it a boy or a girl this time?"

"Another boy, Nathan," answered Pascoe. "A fine, vigorous child, and the wife as well as can be expected. Everything went in the course of nature, and though she wanted for it to be a girl, myself I'm very well pleased. I feel now the Pascoe race is firmly established in the land again, please God, and my duty's done in that respect."

"That's all right, then. The years slip by so. Soon you'll have to begin to think of their future."

"True; but I'm thinking of my own for the moment. There may be great changes before me. This place is mine—a tenement farm, as you know—but I'm faced with problems, and may leave here sooner than you'd imagine."

Nathan nodded.

"Change has a way of holding off and then coming with a rush," he said. "My family will be scattered before long by the look of it. His mother will follow after Barry, and Sarah would be lost without 'em. 'Tis quite on the cards she might up stick and follow. And if you were to go and sell your place—to Duchy, no doubt—then we should be left—me and my wife."

"I shan't sell to Duchy. You're forgetting my sons.

One's sure to be a farmer and carry on the name—if the mines don't open and swallow us. As for you, you won't work for ever. No doubt a time is coming when you will give up."

"Can't afford to do any such thing yet. I'm rather hoping, if the mines come, I shall be bought out. In fact, I must be. Duchy will have to do it."

"They'll come in a year or two, I believe. It is said the big lode they work away over Ter Hill, at Hen Roost, dips under Fox Tor Mire and comes up again here. It failed in the past because the people weren't skilful enough to manage it; but if it is begun again with modern machinery all ought to go right with it."

"So I think and hope," declared Nathan. "I've always believed that would happen, and felt very sure there's millions of good tin under my crofts."

"For my part, it looks as if I might go into business and take up with the Edwards' Stores."

"D'you feel equal to it? A great change for a farmer."

"It is, and, of course, outside of my experience. And if I was alone, I might hesitate. But the Providence that shows us our duty knows that we've got the strength to perform it. God never gives us a greater burden than we can bear, Nathan."

"Your wife, naturally, has it all at her finger ends."

"She has, and she's very much against turning it into a company, which her father thinks to do. If she and I went back, that wouldn't happen."

"A good thing to keep it in the family."

"It is, with my boys to be thought upon. I don't say that I should have chosen it—an open-air man like myself—but I always recognised when I married Sophia that, with her large interests, she had claims."

"Then it looks as if me and my wife would have White Works to ourselves before long," said Nathan. "I shouldn't mind over-much, but all this change in the air is unsettling her. May's one of them women who calculate to her husband's face how life is to go on with her after he's taken. I didn't like it at first, because it seemed cold-blooded; but I'm used to it now and, along of my doubtful health, the subject has cropped up a good deal lately."

"I hope there's nothing serious the matter with you?" asked Charles.

"Nothing serious, I believe, but always something. In fact, I've got to that stage of life when I thank God if I've only got one thing the matter at a time. One a man can generally bear, especially if it's an old enemy he's used to tackling and reckons to conquer; but when you wake of a morning and find more than one ill at you—perhaps something fresh—it makes you down-daunted."

"Well, you ought not to be standing here, I expect, though it's turned warm after the snow. I must get into Princetown presently—shall ride, I suppose. Somebody riding up over now."

A horseman was descending into White Works, and Nathan recognised him.

"My nephew," he said. "Didn't expect him to-day. Anstice is with Mary, I hear. But we'd have took her in if we'd known she was going begging for the minute."

"No child of mine will ever go begging, I hope. James offered and my aunt accepted."

"That's another thing that will call for thought. I'm sure James will be much put about if Anstice and him have to part. She's the apple of his eye."

"A curious friendship. She'll be just such another as your dear daughter, Nathan—all Mortimer."

"My wife often thinks that James will be a good friend to her in the future."

"So my wife says too. And I see no objection. She might be his child. These things are very strange; in fact, nature works in a mysterious way. I don't find, for all my conscientious care of Anstice, that she is what you might call daughterly to me. Never wants to come into my arms, like the boys do."

"Nor yet mine, nor her grandmother's. May wondered if James was setting her against us; but 'no,' I said, that's the last thing James would think of."

"If I imagined any idea of that sort in the mind of James, I should take instant steps," declared Pascoe.

"Don't imagine it for a moment. Your aunt is as fond of Anstice as anybody, and if she thought James was doing wrong by her, she'd soon tell you."

"My Aunt Rebecca is another gathering difficulty."

"Well, well, difficulties are made to be solved. The spring will see all clear, no doubt," answered Nathan, not guessing that elucidation of his own problems awaited him within an hour. But so it was. Barry Worth rode up, saw his uncle, and joined them.

"Is the snow balling much in your horse's shoes, Barry?" asked Mr. Pascoe.

"No," answered the other. "The wind's changed. But there was a proper fall up with us. I very near missed my way last night—right along side the Cross too. Can I have a tell with you, Uncle Nathan, please?"

"Nobody misses their way beside the Cross; and you'll be glad to hear we have another son," said Mr. Pascoe.

"That's right—another little farmer, or another little grocer—I wonder which?" asked the younger man.

But Charles was not amused.

"Another little grocer, from what I hear," answered his uncle.

"It looks as if White Works would be left to the foxes and hawks before long, then," answered Barry.

He and Nathan walked away together.

"I don't see your Aunt May living here without another female in reach, however," murmured Mr. Mortimer.

"More don't I. But what I do see is you and her away as soon as any, Uncle Nathan."

"It might happen if Duchy turns me out for the mines."

"That's only in the air. I'm thinking of something different. I've got a great bit of news for you to-day—for you and aunt also."

"More news! What a chap you are for news to be sure."

"She must hear it too. I want to tell you both. You're going to be properly savage with me, no doubt; or if you're not, she is. But I shan't go till you've forgiven me."

"I'm well used to forgiving the young, I can assure you. 'Tis about all the old be asked to do—not that the young care much whether we forgive 'em or no."

"I do care. So does Marian. I've done a doubtful thing, but it's come out all right, and I'm hopeful you'll see it so. It's all to the good from your point of view and increases your power a lot."

"What a chap! But I don't want to be beholden to my nephew for power. Power's a doubtful advantage, and peace be better."

"Ah, nobody gets what he's best able to manage. It's round pegs in square holes all the world over."

Barry took his horse to the stable, then he entered the house-place and bade his aunt 'good-morning.' She greeted him coldly, but he took his own line.

"I've got a startler for you, so best to fetch out your smelling salts, Aunt May. You'll want 'em, for certain. And you light your pipe, uncle. I'm going to shake up your nerves, I assure you."

"You're always doing that," replied Mrs. Mortimer. "You know my opinion, Barry, and I never say behind your back what I don't say to your face. You don't consider us like you ought, and you take a great deal too much upon you."

"I do," he admitted. "A bad habit of mine, and you'll say so now more than ever, no doubt. But you must judge by results, Aunt May. I've got some very good results for you and Uncle Nathan. And, for that matter, there have been nothing but good results for him since I farmed Nun's Cross. You can't deny it."

"Results ain't everything. We like people to be free and open and above-board, same as ourselves."

"You can't always get results that way, however. The truth is, I'm not understood here."

May Mortimer sniffed.

"When people say they ain't understood, it often means they're understood only too well, Barry."

"Perhaps we understand you better than you understand yourself, nephew," added Nathan.

"Perhaps you do; but you don't understand me so well as Marian does. However, I'm not here about myself."

He had decided that a light touch would best meet the occasion.

"In a word, I'm bringing you something in sight of eight thousand pounds, Aunt May; and no doubt that means—well, you'll know better than I do. I've never had money to speak of myself, though I've handled a bit for my family. Uncle David, you must know, left more

than appeared in his will, a good few thousand more, and I was under secret orders about it. He left the directions. I had to find the money first, for he hid it in a very amazing manner; but I did find it—every penny—and handled it, knowing, of course, it wasn't mine—only on trust. But I looked ahead, and there were very difficult problems that I kept to myself till the time came. I might have done wiser to own up and put the matter in Uncle Nathan's hands, and let him have all the work and responsibility, no doubt; but, judged by results, all's well, and I'm ready to give an account of the lot and show what I've done for you in five years."

"You've been handling our money behind our backs, then?" asked his aunt.

"In a way—yes. But when you see the figures, you'll find I've been handling it mighty clever too. Many men wouldn't have thought it was yours at all. I didn't at first; then, owing to one thing and another, and the example of what straightness means, that Uncle Nathan's always shown me, and Marian also, I began to feel it wasn't mine. You must make allowances in that matter. That's past, and now only the facts are worth bothering about. The facts will please you. They are Beacon Edge Farm and about sixteen thousand in cash, all out at a very good interest."

"And your uncle's to put you into Beacon Edge, I suppose, and have all his trouble over again?"

"Not at all, Aunt May. There's my mother and Aunt Sarah as well as uncle. I've thought a very great deal about you and uncle. I know he doesn't want another farm, and there's no reason now why he should bother about that—or anything else. It would better suit his convenience and yours to be free and retire, I expect, and he can very easily indeed retire now and take you out of White Works, before you're left the last woman in it. This means more than another four hundred pounds a year for uncle, and that, with what he's got, is a fortune without him turning his hand."

She was silent considering this, and Nathan revealed his habit of mind. He had been sitting with his eyes fixed on the speaker.

"A wonderful adventure, and I shall be very interested

to trace out the details and hear particulars. But, as I look at you, Barry, you interest me for the minute more than even this great windfall. I'm considering of you; and I thank God you've saved your soul before it was too late. You've been thinking of me, so you say, and now I'll think on you. And what do I see? You've done evil that good may come. At the bottom of your heart you knew this money wasn't yours. If you'd thought it was, you'd have told us about it. It's my way, like a lot of thinking men, to think cleverer for my neighbour than I can for myself, and I see mighty clear how it was with you. 'Twas pull devil, pull baker; and your Uncle David was the devil and the baker was your own nature; and your own nature have just won at the finish, and only just. A ticklish job, but you've conquered before it was too late, and, God's my judge, I'm quite so well pleased about that as I am about my money. In fact, better pleased. David very near kindiddled you into lasting wickedness, and stretched his strong arm from the grave, no doubt, to do it; but, after five years of sin, it looks as if you'd escaped the chains; and no doubt you'll thank the Lord for it in your grey hairs, if you don't now."

"I do now," declared Barry. "It's a great weight off my mind, and Marian says I'm lucky to have got such a light punishment."

"The punishment is for your uncle to decide," said Mrs. Mortimer. The magnitude of the event had brought out her smelling bottle, as her nephew had promised.

"It is, Aunt May. But I don't think he'll be hard on me when he hears what a lot of trouble I've saved him and how I looked on ahead."

"You're too fond of looking on ahead. How do we know you ain't looking on ahead still and doing other doubtful things with what don't belong to you? You've led a crooked life for five years on your own showing, and trod a very stickle path, and I don't see why your uncle should believe a word you say."

"He does, though," answered Barry. "He knows what all this means, because he understands my character. And he's just showed up the truth with his usual cleverness. I love money, and I've learned how to handle it;

but I love other things too, and peace of mind is worth a lot, no doubt. I'm going straight as a line henceforth."

"And what if your uncle, seeing you bought Beacon Edge with his money, goes back on it? Where are you then?"

Barry regarded his aunt with a smiling face and concealed his hatred like a diplomat.

"It was because I felt sure you would feel like that, Aunt May, that I considered how best to save Uncle Nathan the pain and bother of having to go to law against me and showing me up and disgracing the family. That, we know, might be a pleasure to some people. But it wouldn't be to him. I thought you'd very likely wish to do that in your high-minded way. Though I'm sure you'd hate to ruin me and Marian. But that's why I didn't come to Uncle Nathan first, and had a tell with Aunt Sarah instead."

"And what the mischief have she got to do with it?" asked Mrs. Mortimer, glaring at her nephew.

"Just as much as Uncle Nathan and my mother. I've really tried to consider everybody and save everybody trouble. And knowing how Aunt Sarah hated money, it struck me that if she was to have the farm for her portion, and no bother, it might clear the way for all of us."

Nathan smiled.

"The old Adam wasn't left out of you," he said.

"No more than the old Eve out of Aunt May," replied his nephew, also smiling blandly. "And I'm half afraid she'll be sorry to hear that Marian and I offered a home to Aunt Sarah—her own rooms and all comfort and luxury—at Beacon Edge. She'll be near my mother and my children then. And they are more to her than anybody. And she thinks well of the plan."

"And you call yourself a reformed character!" gasped his aunt.

"What do you think, Uncle Nathan? It seemed to me we couldn't do less. Aunt Sarah's terrible pleased about it."

"And you to have Beacon Edge when she dies?"

"No, Beacon Edge is mine. She won't touch it. More won't my mother. And you've got no use for it neither as I well know. I didn't ask Aunt Sarah for the farm;

but she said she wouldn't join us if I didn't agree to take it there and then."

Barry brought a pile of papers from his pocket.

"I've drawn out the statement to the last farthing—showing how I found his money hid in dollops after Uncle David died, and how I invested it, and how I've paid the death duties and every proper call upon it. All's clear, and I don't think you'll quarrel with the figures; but if there's a doubt in your mind against me, then you can go to Marian. She knows everything, and you can trust her."

"I'll study over the documents," said Nathan. "There's nothing to prevent your Aunt Sarah giving you her portion if so she wills. And for my part, speaking without the figures, I can't object to her having the farm, if that proves a fair third of the lot. I don't wish for the farm—nor yet your Aunt May."

Barry rose to depart.

"I want to be quite frank and open. And if either of you think anything's hidden, and there's any more money you ought to have, you can appoint a lawyer to go into my private affairs and search 'em to the bottom and satisfy you it's not so. I saved a few pounds at Nun's Cross, but, of course, I've paid my way with my own money and always shall do, and I've accounted for every penny of Uncle David's—capital and interest."

"I believe you," answered Nathan. He was already turning over the papers.

"Keep them in their order," advised Barry. "It will be easier to understand them. Now I'll wish you good morning."

"Good morning, nephew."

"Good morning, Aunt May."

But she did not answer, and when he had gone, she poured out a torrent of anger upon Nathan. He expected it. He took off his glasses, set down the papers, and listened patiently without interrupting her, while she urged drastic legal action against the sinner. When she was tired, she began to cry and sniff her salts.

Then he spoke.

"It's often a vexatious thing to be faced with a mind in a different pattern from your own, May, and it's very

aggravating to be up against a quicker and deeper brain than your own. But it's no good kicking against the pricks—which a woman of your character never fails to do—more especially, as in this case, the pricks represent eight thousand pounds of money. Therefore I'd urge you not to kick against 'em for your own comfort. I may be a dull sort of man, but I'm much too clever to go to law on any pretext whatever; and in this case there's nought to go to law about that I can see. So best you dry your eyes and spend your time thinking where we're going to live next year. This lets you out of White Works with the rest of 'em; and as we haven't got anybody on earth to think of but ourselves now, you ought to be fairly content with life for a bit."

"I'll go to my grave knowing that wretch has done you," she said.

"Not at all. Think better of him. He's turned from the crooked path to the straight one afore 'twas too late, and that's more than can be said of many older and wiser than him. I believe Barry; and what if he did have an eye to his own future? He's only human, and he's not doing anything I wouldn't have done in his shoes if I'd been sharp enough to think of it. Money to Sarah is vain. If she's along with Marian and Rosy, that's good enough for her; and she's well in her right to choose the farm for her portion and be free. In fact, that's a mighty convenient come-along-of-it."

But Mrs. Mortimer was uncomforted. She did not argue, but indulged in a hope.

"May I see him in clink, where he belongs, afore I die," she said.

Then she went away and left Nathan to perusal of the papers.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE FURY OF JAMES

James was spending the evening at Nun's Cross some days before Christmas, and though his own problems were unsolved, he could find it in his heart to rejoice for the issue of his brother's.

"A very great triumph for you," he said. "You've won all along the line. Charles Pascoe has been a good bit interested. He says you're one of the clever ones, that manage to make the best of both worlds and get a good show on earth without losing sight of heaven. He's jealous behind his religion, however."

Barry laughed.

"And hasn't he always done the same?"

"It's put new life into the old people; Aunt Sarah's begun to worry about her packing already."

"Poor old dear—I know," said Marian. "I keep telling her we don't go till Lady Day; but she's at it. Yet never was so happy before, I believe."

"So's mother, since she's seen Drewsteignton. And Uncle Nathan's ten years younger now he knows he's going to stop work. Even his wife has been seen to smile. They're house-hunting down to Tavistock. If she was dead, I believe he'd go along with all of you; but he's had his way a good bit lately, and knows when to stop."

"He's one of the best," declared Marian.

"He is," admitted Barry, "and the way he's borne up all his life is a lesson."

"We're to go to him for Christmas—the last time we are ever likely to collect under one roof, no doubt."

"And what about you, Jimmy?" asked Marian. "Are your plans any forwarder?"

"There's not much choice. Mother's at me to take a bit of her new money—as much as I like, in fact—and start a shop of all sorts on my own at Drewsteignton. Of

course, I've got the knowledge. I could do it but for the reasons against."

"'Twas my idea," declared Barry, "and why not? There's plenty of room there. You'd succeed."

"Impossible, because of Anstice. I'm troubled for her, and I see clearer and clearer she'll want me. She'd go to the wall a good bit if I wasn't here. They don't mean anything unkind against her—Sophia's a very fair woman—but Anstice gets shelved. The plain English is, they find her in the way. Miss Pascoe sees it. She wants to leave them, when they move, and take Anstice along with her, and they don't seem to think it's a very out-of-the-way idea—that shows that Anstice doesn't much count. I certainly can't leave her."

"What about the suggestion Damaris made, that you should go and live with her and Benjamin?" asked Marian.

"A very good thought, and I'd be pleased to do it, and I may do it. But there's yet another thing. Somehow I don't see myself under the command of Charles, if he's going to be head of the Stores. I'd only do it for Anstice. I should be near her and able to keep close and see her every day, no doubt. But that don't alter the fact that she doesn't take her place as Charles Pascoe's first. The eldest boy pushes her out of the way already. And she's not the fighting sort—too like her mother."

Barry made an exceedingly cynical suggestion.

"Look here," he said. "You want the kid and they do not. She's a million times more like you than Charles. Sophia said to me herself there wasn't a pinch of Charles in her. Well, why not bluff it—have a hell of a flare-up with Charles and say you want to adopt the child, because you're her father? Bluff it, Jimmy! Then she's yours!"

James stared, and a wave of crimson swept over his face. He actually trembled and could not answer; but Marian did.

"Barry! You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she cried. "How can you be so wicked?"

"What's there wicked about it? Who's hurt?"

"A dead woman's hurt—one that never did or thought a wrong thing."

"What rubbish, Marian! How can you hurt the dead?

Here's a living child that might be made a lot happier by a bit of a plot, and who the devil cares for Pascoe's feelings. If his first wife knew about it, I'm sure she'd be delighted. A mother don't trouble about her fame where her child's concerned. Say it and stick to it, and in a year or two you'll believe it yourself, James. You adopt the child, and as the child's a lot more to you than anybody in the world, you can make her your first thought for evermore."

James had partially recovered; but he was trembling with passion still.

"I'll never forgive you, Barry," he said. "Never as long as I live will I forgive you for that. I've been a good brother to you, as far as I could, and always been your side; but I won't be your brother any more. To think your mind's such a cesspool that it could hatch such a devilish thought against Anstice in her grave—my God! it's too much—it's too much. I wouldn't have believed there was a man in the world could have sunk to such an awful crime."

"Don't be such a silly, weak-minded fool, James!"

But James had nothing more to say. He rose and prepared to go home.

"Stay to supper and forget," pleaded Marian. "Barry never meant it. He couldn't. You know him too well to think he meant it, dear James."

"He did mean it," replied the other. "He knew that was a sacred name to me—greater and dearer than any other earthly name—and he took that name in vain, and said a thing to make the spotless creature turn in her grave. God may forgive him—I never, never will. And I never want to see him, or hear his voice again."

"More you shall, old chap," said Barry. "You get home and keep the windy side of me in future. You're much too good for this world. But, all the same, I've given you a tip well worth taking. You must have told plenty worse lies than that—you a shopman all your life pretty near."

But James did not hear these things. He had gone, and he stumbled home in the dark, trembling hot and cold with emotion before the horror of his brother's thought. It crushed him, embittered him against humanity, overwhelmed him, as a sacrilege had over-

whelmed the pious. He felt contaminated, unclean, not fit to come before the presence of the dead, because his ears had drunk poison and he had listened to foul outrage poured upon that immaculate memory. In his life he had seldom hated any human being as he hated his brother that winter night. He returned home in the extremity of agitation, vouchsafed no explanation of his troubles, but told his mother that he and Barry had parted for ever. Then, leaving her in consternation, he went to bed. For hours the horror persisted in his mind. He lived through it again and again, found every dreadful word stamped upon his memory, and writhed to think that heart of man could have sunk to a conception so vile.

But after he had left his brother, Barry showed little regret or remorse at Marian's expostulations.

"The idea suddenly jumped into my head," he explained. "Perhaps I plumped it out too sharp and hurt the poor man. He's such an unearthly sort of a shadow that he can't stand up to reality. Even to get what he best wants in the world he's not equal to action. I'm sorry; but my mind turns to a bit of intrigue like a duck to water. It would have amused me to get that child for James, and it could easily have been done. Perhaps, when he sees the reward, he'll consider if the game's not worth the candle. I like bringing things off that look hard. Nowadays life for me is eating my beef without salt and mustard—a bit tame. But there's not enough fun to go round in this world. I've had mine, I suppose; now it's the turn of the others."

"There's plenty of fun for you too, Barry," she promised. "You know how happy we've been to see how happy they were. That's the easiest sort of happiness to come by, and it lasts longest too. Nothing can spoil it, because it's clean all through. Men are only not happy because they don't know how to give and take. Some are miserable because life's too easy, and some because life's too hard."

"There's not enough happiness to go round, I reckon," he repeated. "It's got to be divided up thinner, so each shall have a taste. But them that know the full flavour don't want to water it down."

"Happiness is like money," she answered. "There oughtn't to be any rich or poor, and there oughtn't to be any too happy or too miserable."

"What is happiness?" he asked. "How many know what it is? How many ever get any of it really—rich or poor? The whole world runs after it, and yet who knows the thing the word stands for? Happiness belongs to children, and when you're a man you ought to put away childish things. Only a fool can be happy, and that's not happiness neither—it's emptiness."

"Happiness is wisdom, I suppose," Marian suggested.

"The nearest we can get to it is power, I reckon," he declared.

"But James—you won't leave it like this—Christmas at the door and all?"

"How even a worm will turn if you pinch it," he said. "But I did more than pinch the poor soul—I cut him in half. Never saw him squeak so loud before."

"He was cut in half when she died. He was never the same after that."

"He buried his happiness—what poor, ghostly happiness it was."

"And yet it rose again, in a way, with her child. Little Anstice is everything to him."

"And nothing to nobody else, seemingly."

"And yet a good little girl enough."

"She's her mother over again. Even in her young days, before she went to Pascoe, Anstice Mortimer was no more than a faded picture on a wall—nothing better, that I could see."

"But everything to James."

"Like to like. Never mind about this row. James couldn't bear malice for a week if he was paid to do it. It's not in his nature. I'll soon have him friendly again. I've got a game in my mind already."

Marian looked doubtful.

"You needn't trouble yourself," he explained. "It will be all the cards on the table. I ought not to have said that to him, I daresay—chiefly because, even if I'd thought it, as I sometimes did, I could have seen there was no reason to think it. Nobody knowing poor James would have believed it. You might so well expect a

rabbit to tell you he'd killed the fox. But he must try to be a man. You can't have anything for nothing in this world."

"Mr. Pascoe evidently thinks you've proved you can."

"No, no, Marian," he answered, very earnestly. "You'll never know—not even you—the price I've paid for Beacon Edge. However, we're talking about Jimmy. It's a matter of three men. In fact, you may call it two men, for James can be taken for granted."

CHAPTER XXXIX

A CHRISTMAS GIFT

Jack Bascombe, with Jenny, his wife, and his son's family had Nun's Cross to themselves on Christmas Day, for Barry, Marian and their babes accepted, as usual, the hospitality of Nathan Mortimer. The celebration was not entirely cheerful; for the elders reflected that this would probably be the last time they met together at a festival. After lives spent within sound of each other's voices they were to part, and the future was little likely to unite them all again.

James brought to the banquet an active melancholy, for he was already suffering from his estrangement with his brother. It had, however, persisted until the present, and when he was disposed to make friends again, on seeing Barry once more, the unspeakable suggestion that had caused the quarrel flamed back upon the elder's mind and kept him silent, indignant and dumb. He was civil, that the amenities of the occasion might not suffer; but he avoided Barry and devoted himself to the children as much as possible. Anstice had been permitted to join the family party of her grandfather, and in Anstice, her Christmas dinner and Christmas presents, James found preoccupation.

He had brought his usual gift of some boxes of crackers, and these entertained the new generation now, for Barry was concerned about grave matters in secret, and designed that the day, if possible, should be crowned, at least for one of the party, with a substantial addition to life.

His mother knew the intention; but none else, save Marian, was aware of it.

Now the time had come to take the first step and, presently, when the meal was ended and the women were playing with the children, Barry drew his uncle away to smoke in the kitchen.

Even while James felt a sad delight to see how

Anstice resembled her mother, in a little paper sun-bonnet with blue paper ribbons, his name was on his brother's lips.

"It seems as if the future was sure enough now," began Barry, "but there's a few outstanding things, and in my opinion they largely hang upon you, Uncle Nat."

"'Tisn't often you think anything hangs on me, or come to me with a problem before you've settled it yourself," said the old man.

"This isn't my problem. It's largely yours—it belongs to you and James. You know what your little granddaughter is to James."

"And me."

"Yes—that's the point. She's a very great deal more to you and James than her own father."

"In a manner of speaking—yes."

"For the very good reason that she's a Mortimer rather than a Pascoe. She's got what her mother had from you—a kindly and gentle disposition. James understands her better than anybody, and I can't help feeling very strongly myself that, in Pascoe's nest, she's the one too many."

"She's his eldest, anyway."

"But nothing to him. In fact, she's in his way without straining the truth. I feel she's one of us, and I feel she'd be a very great deal happier and be like to have a much better sort of life with us, than elbowed out of everything by her half-brothers in her home."

"Surely you don't want her too?"

"No, I've got my own. And it wouldn't be right or proper, at your age, to have the cost and trouble of a young child in your new home. But there's one home before all homes where she would be happy and prosperous and made a treasure, and looked after and brought up as nowhere else. And that's in my mother's home along with James."

"But James ain't going, and your mother don't want her."

"Whether James goes or does not go depends upon you, Uncle Nathan. It's like this: James is very jealous for Anstice, and the only thing, in my opinion, that would influence her father is the future of the child. Of

course, James will settle his money upon her. He'll never marry, and, if it comes off, she'd be his heir and have all he's got. Mother means to divide her money between Damaris and James, so that will be pretty good for Anstice without anything else; but if, in addition to that, you were in a position to say that you would remember your only grandchild in your will, then Charles would see that by letting my brother take her he was doing far better for her than ever he'd be able to do himself with his growing family of boys."

"Well, well!"

"It's up to you, in a word, to say whether you don't feel Anstice would be a happier child with my mother and James than anywhere else; and that's not all, because, if you agreed, then James would come to Drewsteignton and start a business himself, which he is well able to do. He'd certainly make good, being a very capable man in his own line. Then he wouldn't be under Charles at the Stores, but find himself independent. But if you can't undertake anything, or give any promise on the subject of Anstice, then it all falls to the ground, because, of course, Charles wouldn't agree to anything unless he knew you approved of it."

Mr. Mortimer had dined well and was in a mood to see the force of this argument.

"She's my nearest and dearest, after your aunt," he answered, "and, as my wife is not on particular good terms with any of her family, there won't be any call to doubt the nature of my will and testament when I draw it out. Everything will be left to your Aunt May for her life, and after that there's none to have it but my own family—Anstice first, of course."

"Why not make it as simple as possible, guard the capital, and leave all to Anstice when Aunt May's got no more use for it?"

"That was my own idea. I had a thought that if Charles knew Anstice was to be a rich girl some day, he'd——"

"But Charles is Charles, and Sophia is Sophia. A thousand things might happen. They're very nice, honourable people; but the very fact of Anstice having that money might tempt them to influence her in the

future. There's a danger they might want her money some day. Whereas, with my mother and James, the case is very different. There's nobody on this earth can be trusted like James to guard Anstice and labour for her good, and be jealous for her future."

Barry argued strongly and ingeniously. He painted the child's future with very drab colours, but presented the alternative so attractively that Nathan at length admitted there could be no real comparison between them from the standpoint of Anstice herself.

"It's in a nutshell," concluded Barry. "If you will to Anstice—say, even a clear five thousand at Aunt May's death—then James will gladly promise to leave her everything he's got in the world, supposing her father and stepmother agree to let him have her. But that they'll only do, of course, if you approve of it. So I do hope you'll make it a properly happy Christmas for your granddaughter by agreeing. Of course, she's your all, and as she gets older, and you like the thought of having her in your home, she'd come for as long and as often as you and Aunt May pleased. But in the meantime she's richly and safely provided for—her future and her education and everything. James is what we all know him to be, and I can't think of a happier fate for any tender young child than to be adopted by him."

"More can't I—I grant that."

"She's his life as it is, so say 'yes' and let me tell Charles. The better the day, the better the deed. Or, if you feel it wiser to tell Charles yourself, do so. He'll come to you in any case, of course, before he decides."

"No—you can tell him; and you can tell him I'm agreeable. You've got an art to get men round to your way of thinking. He may turn you down, of course. He may feel it's not in keeping with his position and contrary to his pride, and so on."

"He will—just as you say. That's where I've got to get round him. I believe I know how to tackle him."

"I daresay you do," admitted Nathan. "You know how to tackle most people, it seems to me. If you'd been born in a different sphere of life, Barry, you might have made your mark."

The younger laughed, rather bitterly.

"I'm a reformed character now. Reformed characters don't make any mark. My teeth are drawn. I go on a chain in future. If you lose a vice—to call it a vice—I expect you lose the virtue that went along with it. A nice question—eh? Too deep for you, though, Uncle Nat. Tell 'em I'll be back in an hour, or less."

He went straight to Strane Steps.

His uncle had been easy; but it was very unlikely that Pascoe would prove equally amenable. His hope lay more in Sophia than in her husband.

Elsewhere the family party made merry, and Sarah laughed and her eyes shone, while Rosy sat in her lap and played with toys out of the crackers. Anstice was having a game with James on the floor, and Mary Ann had gone to sleep in her mother's arms.

They talked with simple hope and trust of their future, and looked sometimes at James, where, happy for the nonce, he amused the child.

"The only worry lies there," said his mother. "I'd give all my money thrice over to clear his troubles. Now he's quarrelled with his brother, of all unlikely things, and won't tell me the reason. What's parted 'em, Marian? I never knew James so cross for so long. A fortnight 'tis, at least."

"It was Barry's fault," said Mary's daughter-in-law. "He said an outrageous thing, but I'm sure he didn't think."

Meanwhile, much to the surprise of Mr. Pascoe and his wife, Barry appeared before them. They had, of course, heard of his financial achievements, and while Charles regarded these activities as very objectionable, despite their success, Sophia took a more lenient view. She admired ability and was, perhaps, the only one of them all to perceive that Barry's proceedings, allowing for his character, admitted some little measure of commendation.

"You'll be a good bit surprised to see me," began the visitor. "But I was just over the way, and thought I might come along. I've dropped in to wish you a merry Christmas, and also to ask for half an hour on a subject that will interest you more even than it does my family."

He inquired as to Sophia's health, and hoped the new baby promised well.

"As a family man myself, with another in prospect, I'd like to see him," he said. He praised the elder boys also, and struck a very genial note. Even Rebecca Pascoe, who knew little of him and had always been instructed to regard him as a doubtful character, was thawed by his pleasantness of manner.

Sophia, who knew Barry better than her husband, brought him to the point presently.

"Well," she began, "you didn't only come to say all these nice things, Mr. Worth. What can we do for you?"

"On this day of days," declared Charles, "it is the human privilege to open our hearts that the King of Glory may enter in. And if we do that, it means that we find ourselves more than usual inclined to pleasure our neighbours, where it can be done. This is a turning point in our careers, you may say, and, curiously enough, all our little community is making a change with the spring—old men and children, young men and women."

Barry, contented to find the master of Strane Steps in a mood so amiable, plunged at the great matter that had brought him.

"I'm here for another rather than myself," he said.

"And what better day to work for another?" asked Charles. "In my experience, what we do for others, Barry, is the best we ever do and, in fact, the best the human hand can find to do."

"He ought to know that. He worked for his family for five years, if I understand his mother aright," said Sophia. "He worked for them and saved thousands for them."

Charles, however, felt it no time to examine Barry's philanthropic achievements.

"And who might the other be?" he asked.

"In a word—James. You know James—a modest, shy creature. But a good man if ever there was one, with a high sense of honour and virtue in general."

"He has," admitted Mr. Pascoe. "Time has thrown a very favourable light on James. I won't say in the past that, owing to painful circumstances, I felt to James

as I do now; but I own that there's nobody I can think of at present I favour more than him."

"He's been a godsend to us, and nobody can deny it," declared Rebecca.

"And you've been a godsend to him—all of you, Miss Pascoe. He feels for you as much as that you feel for him—a great respect and admiration for everybody of your name. And it's his only joy and delight in the world to minister and help train up the little girl. He likes to think he's a second father to her."

"He is that, and more," said Sophia.

"And you are happy and comfortable about Anstice when she's with him?"

"We are. He's a very good influence upon her."

"That's your opinion too, Charles?"

"It is," replied the father of Anstice. "There is an understanding between them. As a student of character, one is quick to perceive these things, and, of course, one can see how and why the friendship—so to call it—sprang up."

"It's a great deal more than a friendship. They come to us, you know, for Anstice to play with her cousins, and I have found, and so has Marian, that James and Anstice are like the halves of a flail—one nought without the other. James is never really happy away from Anstice. She's his life, you may say. So much for that. Now Mr. Mortimer feels, and we all feel, that Anstice has, very unfortunately, missed her father's parts and is, you may say, all her dead mother's. Do you feel that?"

"I do, and so does my wife," answered Charles. "A mystery, no doubt, but so it is. And I've heard of many similar cases. My sons, on the contrary, as they grow older—one finds both parents."

"Strong little characters already. You can see it in their faces. But Anstice is going to be like her mother. She'll want a rare good education, and watchful eyes, and a powerful lot of attention—so Marian says. What do you think, Mrs. Pascoe?"

"Every child wants all that," said Sophia.

"Well, now—to come to the point. And don't you be vexed with me, because I've given it a power of thought, and I'm bound to say I think my uncle's idea a very

good one. Else, of course, I'd have had no hand in it. And I'm only here, because they all felt, in such a delicate thing, that an outsider, more or less, might put it better and leave you free to judge. Uncle Nathan, though a quiet man, is a very thinking man, as you know, and he feels about his granddaughter that it would be good if her future was now made clear. Of course, no child of yours will ever be in doubt about its future; but the circumstances are peculiar, and Uncle Nathan feels very strongly that, with your growing family of boys and your coming responsibilities and duties in this big work in Princetown, it might be an advantage if something was done with respect to Anstice."

"She will share our fortunes," said Charles. "Her grandfather need have no fear for my first-born, and I hope he knows it."

"He hasn't any fear. He's thinking all round the subject, and quite so much about you as the child. He knows what a mother Mrs. Pascoe has been to the little girl, and if things were different he wouldn't have raised the question. But, as a matter of fact, James is the one who put this into his head. James is quick as lightning where Anstice is concerned, and he feels to her that she's more to him than life itself, and he wants very much indeed to make Anstice his heir."

"Is he going to stop at the Stores, or isn't he?" interrupted Sophia. "He doesn't seem equal to making up his mind. Not that there's any hurry."

"He feels very tenderly there. He's a very sensitive chap, and he has an idea that Charles would rather he didn't stop. He's anxious to pleasure Charles, of course."

"I don't want him to consider me," answered Mr. Pascoe.

"He wants to consider everybody in reason, and you first. My mother's wishful for him to start on his own at Drewsteignton, and he's well able to do it, and there's a good opening."

"Nothing better could happen," declared Sophia firmly. "But it's up to James himself. He needn't think we wish him away. Far from it. A better shopman you couldn't find. But his good——"

"If he goes, or if he does not, all hangs on Anstice,

you see. And this is the whole point. James would make Anstice his heir and leave all he ever saves and all he inherits from his mother to her. My mother leaves half of her fortune to James and half to Damaris, as I've got the farm at Drewsteignton. So, through James alone, Anstice will have at the least five thousand, and possibly more. Then Uncle Nathan, who much wishes it to happen, for his part will promise a clear five thousand of his money to Anstice on his wife's death; and there's no reason to doubt she'd get all, for he's nobody else to think about. You can say, then, that if this arrangement goes through, Anstice will be an heiress, and while she's growing up, she'll have everything that sleepless care and affection can do for her—also the best possible education."

"If what goes through?" asked Sophia; but she had guessed.

"There's only one condition to this offer, and that, of course, is the whole thing. My people are all of one mind and they're all very devoted to the child, and she's wrapped up in them, as you know. And the condition is that James adopts Anstice and puts her in the place of his own daughter and lives for her. And it is for your united sense to decide whether you'll allow Anstice to go to my mother when the change comes, and whether, only thinking of the child and not of your natural regard for her, it won't offer a finer future and more happiness to her to let that happen than any other course. It's a common thing, as you know, for one branch of a family to take over the care and upbringing of a child from another branch of a family; and in this case, for my part, it seems a very fitting and proper sort of plan. And we're all for it, heart and soul; but decision, of course, lies with Mr. Pascoe."

They were silent, and he added a final word.

"It lies, no doubt, between your natural affection for the little girl and the future that we're prepared to offer her. You have to consider more than I can presume to know about it; but if you can make this sacrifice for her sake, though she may not be brought up quite in your style, she'll have an education to fit her for a high place and wealth to meet her future, whatever it may be. You can't be asked, with your boys and their

demands, to settle ten thousand pounds on Anstice. It wouldn't be right or reasonable, but we are ready and willing to do that, whatever betides. And you'll know where she is and the company she keeps and the manner of people who will be round her. And if you can rise to it for her sake, James would come with us and start in good style at Drewsteignton. If not, then he'd stop at the Stores, by your leave, because he couldn't live out of sight of the child."

Sophia had decided, but she was far too sagacious to say so. She spoke, however, though not to her husband.

"What do you think, Aunt Rebecca? I always feel you understand Anstice a lot better than I do."

Miss Pascoe was for the plan.

"Putting the child first, as we all must, I can only say I believe it would be a very righteous thing to happen," she said. "Charles has been a wonderful good father to Anstice, and we can leave it to him. It isn't for us to say. But he can look farther ahead than us, with his large brain, and we may be very sure he will look ahead and understand how this would work out."

"James, of course, would have come to you himself; but he felt too modest about it. He feared that Charles might reckon that he was daring a bit too much. Charles, of course, has taught my brother a lot of wisdom, as he was bound to do; and Uncle Nathan also. They defer to him, and so they felt, in a highly important matter like this, they would be easier if they sent me as a messenger, because I could state the case without the deep feeling they had."

Mr. Pascoe puffed out his chest.

"And what would they have to say if I declined their proposition?" he asked.

"They could only bend to your judgment."

"Financially, I mean?"

"I can't tell you. Of course, James is still young. He'd feel then he wasn't allowed any interest in Anstice, beyond the pleasure of pulling her about in her little cart sometimes; and with his loving heart, no doubt, he'd turn elsewhere. He must have something to pour himself out on, and he might even marry if he felt he couldn't be any lasting good to Anstice. As for Uncle Nathan, he's

going to Tavistock, as you know, and he'll have fresh interests and probably forget all about the child if he knows it isn't to be one of us. No doubt my aunt's people will flock round him."

"A very unnatural thing if he did forget her," said Mr. Pascoe.

There was a pause; then he resumed.

"It is not my way to decide any question without due and proper consideration. And it is not my way to be startled out of my steady stride by surprises, because I well know that surprises must come. Human nature is, in fact, full of them. And if we can surprise ourselves up to the age of fifty, and even beyond it, as it is well known we can, then naturally other people surprise us still more."

"But there's always the Lord to depend upon," said his aunt.

"Very true. There's the Rock of Ages, and if we have our backs against the Rock of Ages, no surprise sprung upon us by this mortal life can shake us."

"There's pleasant and unpleasant surprises," suggested Sophia. "And more unpleasant than not. In this case there's nothing whatever unpleasant to it, and I wouldn't go so far as to say it was very much of a surprise to me. I've felt it in the air, so to say."

"If that is so," replied Charles, "no doubt you've turned it over in your mind, Sophia. And I should be a good bit interested to know how the scheme presented itself to you. Personally, I feel it a shock."

Mrs. Pascoe showed great tact.

"It is not for me to put more than my own idea before you, Charles. Of course, my position with respect to Anstice is a delicate one."

"And very delicate you've always been, hasn't she, Aunt Rebecca?"

"Very much so indeed," said his aunt. "And the test is the high opinion of Nathan Mortimer on that subject—not, of course, to name James."

"I'm fond of Anstice because she belongs to Charles, and for no other reason," confessed Sophia frankly. "I come of a stock that's got no dreaming powers in us, but look at life from the point of view that it's a fight and struggle, where you must be wide awake first and last and

always. Like you, Mr. Worth, and not like James. Like my husband too, who is a very practical man. But I fully see that it takes all sorts to make a world, and no doubt the dreamers have their place, and no man has been a dreamer more than James; yet no man has done his duty better. I respect James exceedingly for his faithfulness and his great sense of honour and his good heart. I can see him running a small business very well and prosperously, and I can see him being a rare good foster-father to Anstice, for he loves her for her mother's sake as well as her own, and he knows my husband's views of right and honour, and sees much like Charles in all things of the future life. She'd be as safe as it's possible to imagine anybody. So there it is as far as I'm concerned. I agree with Aunt Rebecca that it would be a very beautiful thing to fall out. But I'm nobody in this matter—more's Aunt Rebecca. It is for my husband to consider it in all its bearings and put Anstice and her future first in his mind. What he says will be the right thing to happen."

"I'm sure of it," answered Barry, who now knew that he had won.

"To-day is Christmas Day," observed Charles. "To the Christian the birthday of the Lord is a day above all other days, and a very good day to do high deeds. And I may tell you that such is the judgment of my Aunt Rebecca and Mrs. Pascoe that I very seldom find myself taking a contrary opinion when they are at one."

"That's because, no doubt, you've formed their judgment, I expect," ventured Barry. "It's the same with me and Marian—to compare small things to great. She, as you know, has a very steadfast view of what is right and fine."

"The feminine mind may be trusted to deal with such a question as this pretty correctly, I believe," granted Charles. "I cannot," he continued, "decide upon such a problem off-hand. I must take it to my Maker and to the Maker of us all. One has also to consider one's self-respect and the opinion of the people."

"Of course, Charles," declared Sophia. "And your self-respect always lies at the foundation of well-being and well-doing to others. And the people know it."

" The future of Anstice is very near your heart, Charles, as your first-born's future would be," added Miss Pascoe.

" I can never forget she is my first-born, of course."

" Nor yet anybody else," asserted Barry. " That's her tower of strength. She's got that behind her—with her ten thousand pounds. Now I must get back to my folk. I needn't tell you they hang upon your words."

" I shall not keep them long," promised Mr. Pascoe. " In all probability the Light will come by to-morrow."

Barry rose to go and Mrs. Pascoe saw him out.

" It's all right. You can tell them it will be just as they wish. Good night," she said.

" Sure you approve ? "

" Nothing better could happen. It cuts a lot of knots. He's going to say ' yes ' ; but tell 'em not to name it till he does."

He nodded and thanked her, then went back to his family.

They were wondering what had become of him. Only Marian and his uncle knew the purpose of his visit, and both were deeply interested. Sarah had returned home to rest.

" It's going to happen," said Barry, for the benefit of those who understood. " Only it must come from him. Don't mention it when you see him, Uncle Nathan. Let it come from him."

" He'll agree ? " said Marian.

" He will—now you and Uncle Nat can tell mother and Aunt May and I'll talk to my brother."

Mrs. Mortimer and a servant were preparing tea ; Mary Ann was on her grandmother's lap ; while Rosy and Anstice still played with James in a corner.

" I'm afraid I don't want to talk to you, Barry," said James doubtfully.

" I know you don't, old chap. But we've got to do a lot of things we don't want in this funny world. I'll ask you to bury the hatchet, please, for five minutes ; then we can be enemies again. I've got something I must say to you to-night before I go home. It's important, or so it looks to me. You may not think so. You'll put me in a very awkward position, however, if you won't listen, because a good deal hangs upon it."

James rose and left the children.

"It's Christmas Day," he said, as Mr. Pascoe had remarked before him. "Of course, if it's anything to do with your welfare, Barry—but I never can be the same to you till you apologise to me for that fearful thing you said. You mustn't expect it. Then I'll forgive, but I can't forget."

They went out together and, since the night had drawn in cold, Barry suggested that they should go to their mother's house. They reached it in two minutes and James flung a fresh peat on the fire, while Barry found a bottle of whiskey in a cupboard and helped himself. He drank, and spoke. His hard work was done; now came his amusement.

"It's nothing much really. I've got a little present for you—that's all. Everybody else has had their bit of luck; but you—poor devil—you never get none."

"I can't take anything from you, Barry," answered James earnestly. "We're out, and you know why. I don't want to go over the dreadful past again. But you said a thing that——"

"Well, I'm sorry. I ought not to have said that to you."

"Or thought it—the awful thing was to think it."

"We can't help our thoughts. But I'm sorry, and this little twopenny-halfpenny gift I've got will show you I'm sorry. It's nought in itself, but shows I'm friendly to you."

"If you're sorry to God for letting such a vile and fearful thing come into your heart and on to your lips, I forgive you," answered James. "I tell you honestly, Barry, it's difficult to do it. I was never drove to such a pitch of fiereeness in my life before. I found it hard to keep my hands off you."

"Fancy! But I'm sure you did. But you don't want to kill me now? You forgive me and don't bear no malice against me?"

"Yes, I do—it's Christmas, and she'd forgive you—even she would—a saint of God that forgave all that ever wronged her."

"That's all right, then. And will you accept my little present?"

" Yes, I'll accept it. But, I warn you, I've got no Christmas present for you this year, Barry. I couldn't bring myself to do it—not this year—though the first time."

" Well, 'tis a very small thing, but I want you to promise to take it. I don't want it left on my hands, because it wouldn't be no great use to me."

" I'll take it. I've said so. I'll take it as it was meant—a sign of contrition and kindness in you. We've always been good friends. I never forget kind things. I remember how you tried to help me—with her."

" Ah ! I couldn't get her for you ; but I've got the little 'un all right."

" What do you mean ? "

" She's yours—little Anstice—yours, old chap—if you want her."

James clasped his hands and looked far away.

" ' Want her ' ! No, no ; don't you make jokes about that. That's sacred. You can't get that for me. Life comes between. But I'll never leave her, Barry."

" She'll never leave you now—if you're agreeable. I've been taking your name in vain to-night, James. I've told her grandfather you was willing to adopt Anstice."

" What are you saying ? "

" He jumped at it on one condition—you leave all your money to her."

" Who should I leave it to ? 'Tis hers now."

" Then I went to her father and told him that Anstice was to be down for five thousand from Uncle Nathan, and for all you had, or ever would have, if only you was allowed to adopt her for your very own—your very own—lock, stock and barrel—soul and body. And he's going to do it ! And if you're off the bargain I shall be down and out."

" Barry ! "

" Gospel truth. I thought of a lot of better Christmas presents for you, but Marian would have it you'd like that bit of a child more than anything. And I always believe Marian. So now I hope you'll see me through."

" Mine—mine—oh, my God ! "

He held his brother's right hand and gripped it with all his strength, while his tears fell over it.

CHAPTER XL

VALE

THE bloom of a delicate east wind was on the hills—a warm, grey haze afar off, that deepened as it approached, and under the sunshine turned the cloud shadows to gentian blue, where they roamed the wilderness. It was mid-June and Fox Tor Mire, brushed with quickening green, rolled out within its ambit of hills. New life of herbage smothered the grey sère of the past, and in the valleys lush grasses beckoned the flocks and herds again. The mire was darkened by impermanent shadows from above and by the lasting stretches of heather that sprawled upon it, as yet untouched by blossom. From the bogs and reed-beds sparkled a cold, silver flash and fret of seeding cotton grasses. Peat cuttings yawned black in the fens, with scads piled to dry beside them, and cattle roamed even to the ridge of Cater's Beam, where it swung glimmering vast along the sky-line in a mantle of heat. Horned sheep with black faces and heavy fleeces panted and cried to be shorn; the dun and black Scots cattle herded apart; upon the green downs stood many a mare in the sunshine, with a little foal stretched sleeping in the grass at her feet.

On the western facing hill rose the fragments of Fox Tor Farm—a cluster of grey with broken walls jutting into nothingness round about; while, a mile distant, ascended the more enduring twin masses of Fox Tor itself beneath the Beam.

Round Strane Steps the white-thorn and alder bloomed again and threw blossom over the green bushes. A feather of smoke ascended from the kitchen chimney and a new tenant sat at meat within; but Nathan Mortimer's little farm in the old mine workings was empty, and the Black Houses stood lifeless, save for cattle that clustered red in the shade of the northern wall. Their

gardens were green with weeds; no fowls strutted at their barred thresholds; no dog barked; no linen flapped on the drying line; no short blind, with a geranium blinking behind it, hid the parlour windows. Only the heath larks twinkled aloft and the carrion crows croaked on their highways over the heights. The great, patient, unchanging mire held sunshine to the brim and, for once, seemed to relax its eternal gravity and smile under the happiest conditions it could know.

Overlooking this familiar scene, on a bank where golden tormentil and lotus, starry white bedstraw and blue milkwort wove their radiance into the grasses, there sat a man and a child. Before them opened the little valley of White Works; behind them the leat threw a shining loop, as it made a concave dip into the hillside.

The man was older than his years—a pensive soul, growing round in the back and with thin hair touched to grey—an epicene spirit, who regarded the child with a mother's expression rather than a father's; while the little one had a wealth of pale, brown hair over her shoulders, great, pale brown eyes and lovely lips, moulding firmly out of the baby triangle they had formed a year ago. She was a hearty, healthy and merry elf; but now she found time to delay her present adventure and listen while her companion talked in a slow and gentle voice.

More than a year had passed since the general exodus, and now James Worth made brief holiday from his shop at Drewsteignton and came, with his foster-daughter, to spend it at Princetown. They stayed with Damaris Halfyard, but visited the grandparents of Anstice in Tavistock and her father at the general stores. Miss Rebecca Pascoe also welcomed the natives. She dwelt now in a little house apart from her nephew.

Their social duties done, James journeyed hither to spend long hours with the child upon the day before returning to his home. Their meal was in his pocket and a big bottle of milk for Anstice.

She asked questions, while he, deep in thought, before the old memorials, answered mechanically. But presently he spoke to her—just as Anstice recognised a familiar

tryst of old and greeted the rusty fragments of an iron bedstead with delight.

"Sit here on the green side and list to me. We'll have a fine game presently," said James. She obeyed, and he put his arm round her.

"You see that grey ruin over there on the far side of the mire, Anstice? That was a farm once, and your great-grandmother was born there. She was called Mary Jane Worth, and I remember her, though you don't. She married John Mortimer, who followed your great-great-grandfather at Nun's Cross Farm, where your great-uncle David used to be, and where your Uncle Barry and Aunt Marian lived before they went to Drewsteignton."

Anstice nodded.

"In that house down there your mother was born, and that little chicket window under the roof was the window of her room. She's looked out of that window thousands of times. And there your grandfather and grandmother lived—them you saw at Tavistock on Friday."

The child gazed without emotion.

"And to the right are the Black Houses. Aunt Mary lived in one, and I lived with her; and Aunt Sarah lived in another; and the middle one was empty. Now they're all empty."

He said nothing of Strane Steps, but turned his back on it. Nor did Anstice show any interest. Nearer things were beginning to attract her, for the young seek their pleasures close at hand. James summed up.

"So all your forbears lived around here, you see—great-grandfather and grandfather and mother and aunts and cousins."

"And you too," she said, looking up at him.

"Yes, I lived here too—for thirty-five years by the will of God."

To the child's mind new impressions had already effaced most earlier memories; but the latter came back slowly, and she was reminded through her eyes of past amusements. Memory worked in her little fair head as she sat with her hand in his, while his eyes roamed the old scenes and his thoughts were with her mother.

Then Anstice woke as it had been from sleep. Her eyes sparkled and mirrored the well-loved rubbish heap of broken shards and rusty tins beneath them. She rose to her feet and pulled at his hand.

"Now come and make a game, father," she said.

THE END.

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